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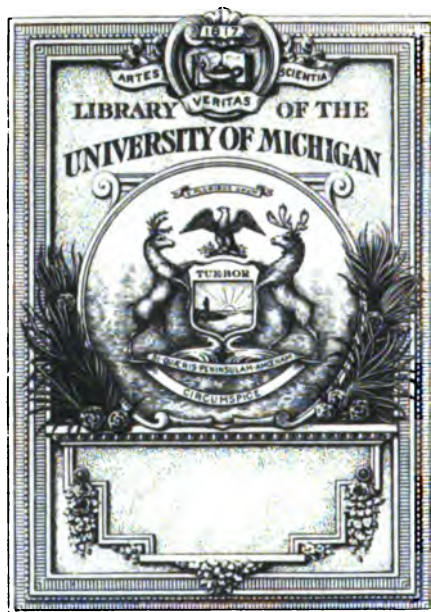
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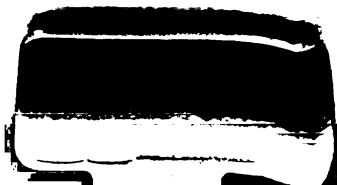
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A VIEW
OF THE PRINCIPAL
DEISTICAL WRITERS,

THAT HAVE APPEARED IN ENGLAND IN THE LAST AND PRESENT CENTURY.

WITH OBSERVATIONS UPON THEM:

AND

ACCOUNT OF THE ANSWERS THAT HAVE BEEN PUBLISHED
AGAINST THEM.

In several Letters to a Friend.

BY JOHN LELAND, D.D.

1754.

WITH AN APPENDIX

BY W. L. BROWN, D.D.,

PRINCIPAL OF MARESCHAL COLLEGE, ABERDEEN, ETC. ETC.

AND

AN INTRODUCTION;

COMPRISING A SUCCINCT VIEW OF THE SUBSEQUENT HISTORY OF THE
CONTROVERSY.

BY CYRUS R. EDMONDS,

AUTHOR OF "THE LIFE AND TIMES OF GENERAL WASHINGTON."

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PREFACE TO THE FIFTH EDITION.

No man that is not utterly unacquainted with the state of things among us can be ignorant, that in the last, and especially in the present age, there have been many books published, the manifest design of which was to set aside revealed religion. Never in any country where Christianity is professed, were there such repeated attempts to subvert its divine authority, carried on sometimes under various disguises, and at other times without a disguise at all. The most noted writers on that side have been at liberty to produce their strongest objections; these objections have been retailed by others; and many seem to take it for granted, that Christianity hath received very sensible wounds by the several attacks that have been made upon it, and that they have greatly hurt its credit, and weakened its authority.

But whosoever will be at the pains impartially to examine those of the deistical writers that have hitherto appeared among us, and to compare them with the answers which have been made to them, will find, that upon a nearer view they are far from being so formidable as some have been apt to apprehend. And since there are few that have leisure or patience for a particular inquiry into the several writings which have appeared in this controversy, some judicious persons, who wish well to the interest of our common Christianity, have been of opinion, that it might be of real service to give a summary view of the most noted books that have been published against revealed religion for above a century past, together with proper observations upon them. From such a view, the reader might be enabled to form some notion of the several turns this controversy hath taken, how often the enemies of revealed religion have thought proper to change their methods of attack, the different disguises and appearances they have put on, and the several schemes they have formed, all directed to one main end, viz. to set aside revelation, and to substitute mere natural religion, or, which seems to have been the intention of some of them, no religion at all, in its room.

Upon such a comparison between those that have attacked Christianity, and those that have been written in defence of it, it would appear, that if it be really true, that deism and infidelity have made a great progress among us, it must have been owing to something else than the force of reason and argument; that the Christian religion is in no danger from a free and impartial inquiry; and that

the most plausible objections which have been brought against it, though advanced with great confidence, and frequently repeated, have been fairly and solidly confuted. Such a view would make it manifest, that the enemies of Christianity have not generally behaved as became fair adversaries, but have rather acted as if they judged any arts lawful by which they thought they might gain their cause. And yet, notwithstanding their utmost efforts for above a century past, they have really been able to say but little against the Christian religion, considered in its original purity, as delivered by Christ and his apostles, or to invalidate the solid evidences by which it is attested and confirmed.

* For these reasons it hath been judged, that a short and comprehensive view of the deistical writers of the last and present age might be of great use. And as the course of my studies hath led me to be conversant in several of those writings which have been published on both sides in this important controversy, it was urged upon me, by some persons for whom I have a great regard, to undertake this work. There was one great objection, which hindered me for some time from attempting it, and which still appeareth to me to be of no small weight, and that is, that as, according to the plan that was formed, it would be necessary to give an account of the answers published to the books I should have occasion to mention, this would oblige me to take notice of some of my own. I am sensible how difficult it is for an author to speak of his own performances, in such a manner as not to intrench upon the rules of decency. If he give a favourable character of them, this will be interpreted as a proof of his vanity, any appearance of which is usually turned to his disadvantage. And on the other hand, if he should make no mention of his own books at all, where the nature of the design in which he is engaged makes it proper for him to mention them, this might perhaps be censured as a false and affected modesty. It is no easy matter to keep clear of these extremes; and, for this reason, it would have been a particular pleasure to me to have seen this work undertaken by another hand; but as this hath not been done, I have chosen rather to attempt it myself, than that a work, which I cannot but think might be of real service, should be neglected. It cannot be expected, that a distinct notice should be taken of all the writers that have appeared among us against revealed religion for this century past. This, if it could be executed, would take too large a compass, and be of no great use. A view of the principal of them, or, at least, of those who have made the greatest noise, may be sufficient. And the design is not to give an historical account of the authors, or of their personal

characters, but to give some idea of their writings, which alone we have properly to do with.

The method proposed, and for the most part pursued, is this : The several writers are mentioned in the order of time in which they appeared. Some account is given of their writings, and of the several schemes they have advanced, as far as the cause of revelation is concerned. And great care has been taken to make a fair representation of them, according to the best judgment I could form of their design. Some observations are added, which may help to lead the reader into a just notion of those writings, and to detect and obviate the ill tendency of them. There is also an account subjoined of the answers that were published ; not all of them, but some of the most remarkable, or such as have come under the author's special notice. And very probably some have been omitted, which might well deserve to be particularly mentioned.

This may suffice to give a general idea of the following work ; at the end of which there are some reflections subjoined, which seem naturally to arise upon such a view as is here given. Observations are made on the conduct of the deists in the management of the argument. And the whole concludes with a brief representation of the evidences for the Christian religion, and its excellent nature and tendency.

What has been now laid before the reader, is taken from the Preface to the first edition : and it gives a just account of the original nature and design of this work, which was at first intended only to make up one volume. But not long after the publication of it, I was put in mind of a considerable omission I had been guilty of in making no mention of Mr. Hume, who was looked upon to be one of the most subtle writers that had of late appeared against Christianity. About the same time was published, a pompous edition of the works of the late Lord Viscount Bolingbroke, in five volumes quarto, the last three of which seemed to be principally intended against revealed, and even against some important principles of what is usually called natural, religion. Some persons, for whose judgment and friendship I have a great regard, were of opinion, that, to complete the design which was proposed in publishing the *View of the Deistical Writers*, it was necessary to take a distinct notice of the writings of Mr. Hume and Lord Bolingbroke : and that in that case it might be of use to make more large and particular observations upon them, than could properly be done where a number of writers came under consideration. This produced a second volume, which, though it had the same title with the former, viz. *A View of the Deistical Writers*, yet differed from it in

this, that it did not contain strictures and observations upon a variety of authors, but a large and particular consideration of the only two there examined, viz. Mr. Hume and the late Lord Bolingbroke, especially the latter. And this was judged necessary, considering his Lordship's high reputation as a writer, and that there are scarcely any of the objections against Christianity which he hath not repeated and urged in one part or other of his works, and that with a peculiar confidence, and with all the strength of reason and vivacity of imagination he was master of. And as I then thought I had finished the design, that volume ended with an *Address to Deists and professed Christians*, which appeared to me to be a proper conclusion of the whole.

But after the second volume was published, some letters were sent me, relating both to that and the former volume, which put me upon reconsidering some things in them, and making farther additions and illustrations, which I thought might be of advantage to the main design. These were thrown into a *Supplement*, which made up a third volume, and was published separately for the use of those who had purchased the two former.

It gives me some concern, that this work is become so much larger than 'was at first intended, which I am afraid will prove a disadvantage to it, and disgust or discourage some readers. But I hope favourable allowances will be made, considering the extent of the design, and the variety of matters here treated of. I believe it will appear, that there are few objections which have been advanced in this controversy, but what are taken notice of in the following work, and either sufficiently obviated, or references are made to books where fuller answers are to be found.

May God in his holy providence follow what is now published with his blessing, that it may prove of real service to the important interests of religion among us, to promote which, as far as my ability reaches, I shall ever account the greatest happiness of my life. And it should be the matter of our earnest prayers to God, that all those who value themselves upon the honourable name and privileges of Christians, may join in united efforts to support so glorious a cause, in which the preservation and advancement of true religion and virtue, the peace and good order of society, and the present and eternal happiness of individuals, are so nearly concerned.

I have nothing farther to add, but that in this as well as the former editions the whole is conducted in a series of letters, which were written to my most worthy and much esteemed friend, the reverend Dr. Thomas Wilson, rector of Walbrook, and prebendary of Westminster, in the form in which they now appear.

INTRODUCTION.

THE comparative inefficiency of controversy, for the establishment and propagation of truth, has long been a point of general agreement. The almost impossibility of supplanting the notion of an opponent by this means, has passed into a proverb; and the lists of polemical contest, in particular, resemble not so much a field of battle for the dispute of territory, as an arena for fencing, in which the antagonists practise the use of weapons for the maintenance of scanty frontiers, which are often the grounds of an endless litigation, neither admitting of decision nor appeal.

It is further observable, in theological controversy, that the acrimony which it has displayed, has generally been in inverse proportion to the importance of the points at issue; so that, what may be called the *civil* dissensions of divines, have ever been the most rancorous; and where the proximity of the parties has enabled them to grapple each other closely, the strife has been marked by the deadliest bitterness.

Neither of these features, however, have characterized the great preliminary discussion, on the decision of which depends the very existence of all the minor points of variance among divines. The deistical controversy may be regarded as the most momentous that ever attracted the notice, and employed the energies of the human mind. In it are involved no less than the claims of the word of God on the attention of men, the truth or imposture of the entire system of Christianity, and, by inference, of every other form of religious belief; so that the eternity of man's existence, the dignity or insignificance of his nature, the whole compass of his interests, the extreme possibilities of good and ill—all hang suspended on the issue of this mighty contest.

With these considerations, the earlier disputants, on both sides, seem to have been deeply impressed. The purer and more profound school of Freethinkers, though they had no personal joys and consolations dependent on the result of their labours, and nothing to hope from success but the insignia of victory, yet seemed consci-

entiously convinced of the truth of their opinions, and not altogether insensible to the magnitude of the question. Accordingly, they wrote for the most part with seriousness and dignity; they ever maintained at least the semblance of reasoning; and even, when betrayed into sophism, they rarely seemed to lose sight of the intrinsic greatness of the subject they were discussing. It seems natural to expect, that the advocates of Christianity, whose dearest interests were embarked in the system they maintained, should conduct their part of the dispute with the most intense energy, and at the same time with a trembling cautiousness, lest a cause of such universal interest should suffer even a temporary disadvantage through any oversight of theirs. Accordingly, the writings of the earlier defenders of revelation supply some of the most invaluable models of fair and philosophical investigation of which our literature can boast. Massive learning, relieved of its cumbrousness by masterly arrangement—close and compact argument, which disdained in its progress any declamatory flourishes which could indicate a premature triumph—unassuming boldness and steadiness of purpose—the candour that scorned an unfair advantage, and the generosity that spared the fallen and the misguided—such were the attributes which distinguished, throughout the contest, these illustrious defenders of the faith. The more recent aspect of the controversy has been somewhat different. In the battle waged by philosophers, victory had plainly declared on the side of Christianity. The wretched and desperate adherents of the conquered party, have subsequently seemed to fight, not for conquest, but existence. In their desperation they have lost their discipline; and their opponents, consequently, in the security of success, have in some instances deemed it sufficient to chastise their insolence with the appropriate scourge of ridicule.

The earlier annals of the deistical controversy have been recorded, with equal ability and fairness, by Dr. Leland, in that invaluable work of which a new edition is now offered to the public. It should not, however, be regarded as merely historical. It constitutes of itself a most masterly defence of the Christian religion. It abounds with unanswerable arguments against every species of infidelity, and confers upon its author the rank of an eminent defender of the authenticity and authority of the Bible. It will be the design of the writer, in the following introductory pages, to present a cursory, but, as far as he is able, a comprehensive view of the deistical writings which have appeared since the publication of Dr. Leland's treatise; and of those productions, on the evidences of the Christian religion, to which they have given rise. In one respect the execu-

tion of this task must of necessity be defective. On the one hand, the infidel writers of modern times have, for an obvious reason, betaken themselves to arguments which are undeserving of a particular mention here, as they have long ago been exposed and refuted. While, on the other hand, the extended promulgation of sceptical opinions in modern times, has called forth a series of works in defence of Christianity, not so substantially different as to require a separate analysis-- a process inconsistent with the limits allotted to this Introduction.

The most recent impugner of divine revelation, whose writings underwent the scrutiny of Dr. Leland, was David Hume. His philosophical writings, in general, were subjected to a searching analysis, and, had no other reply appeared, they would have been regarded as fully and fairly refuted. Since that time, however, the most strictly argumentative, and therefore the most formidable of his writings, (the Essay on Miracles), has been answered by Dr. George Campbell, in a work, which for perspicuity and force of reasoning, and for the candid and catholic spirit which it displays throughout, will ever be regarded as one of the highest models of theological controversy, and one of the grandest bulwarks of the Christian faith. Although the learned author of the following work has bestowed much of his labour and ingenuity upon that part of it which he has devoted to Mr. Hume's celebrated essay, yet, as Dr. Campbell's refutation has ever been regarded as the most complete and triumphant, it may be proper to present, in this place, a brief view of the line of argument he has adopted.

It was the design of Mr. Hume to prove, that miracles wrought in support of a system of religion, could be rationally received only by those who witnessed them. He declares, that "a miracle supported by any human testimony, is more properly a subject of derision than of argument;" and, again, that "no testimony for any kind of miracle can ever possibly amount to a probability, much less to a proof." His argument in support of this position, has been thus compendiously stated by Dr. Campbell.

"Experience is our only guide in reasoning concerning matters of fact. Experience is in some things variable, in some things uniform. A variable experience gives rise only to probability; an uniform experience amounts to a proof. Probability always supposes an opposition of experiments and observations, where the one side is found to overbalance the other, and to produce a degree of evidence proportioned to the superiority. In such cases we must balance the opposite experiments, and deduct the lesser number from the greater, in order to know the exact force of the superior

evidence. Our belief or assurance of any fact, from the report of eye-witnesses, is derived from no other principle than experience; that is, our observation of the veracity of human testimony, and of the usual conformity of facts to the reports of witnesses. Now if the fact attested partakes of the marvellous, if it is such as has seldom fallen under our observation, here is a contest of two opposite experiences, of which the one destroys the other, as far as its force goes, and the superior can only operate on the mind by the force which remains. The very same principle of experience, which gives a certain degree of assurance in the testimony of witnesses, gives us also, in this case, another degree of assurance against the fact which they endeavour to establish; from which contradiction there necessarily arises a counterpoise, and mutual destruction of belief and authority. Further, if the fact affirmed by the witnesses, instead of being only marvellous, is really miraculous; if, besides, the testimony considered apart and in itself amounts to an entire proof; in that case there is proof against proof, of which the strongest must prevail, but still with a diminution of its force, in proportion to that of its antagonist. A miracle is a violation of the laws of nature; and as a firm and unalterable experience has established these laws, the proof against a miracle, from the very nature of the fact, is as entire, as any argument from experience can possibly be imagined. And if so, it is an undeniable consequence, that it cannot be surmounted by any proof whatever from testimony. A miracle therefore, however attested, can never be rendered credible, even in the lowest degree."

The fallacies into which such writers as Mr. Hume are betrayed, will be generally found to reside in those elementary premises, in which error lies so contiguous to truth, that its divergence is the least perceptible. Accordingly, we find in his definition of a miracle, an inaccuracy which his opponent has not fully exposed. He describes it as a transgression of the laws of nature, or, as he elsewhere less figuratively expresses it, a "violation of the usual course of nature." It might seem captious, to infer from this latter expression, that every unusual event must be regarded as miraculous. A far more vital objection, however, may be urged against it. Let it be remembered, that by the very nature of his argument, the evidence of testimony is excluded, and therefore, that our judgment respecting the ordinary course of nature must be formed solely upon personal observation. But with how few, comparatively, of the operations of nature are we personally acquainted; in how much fewer cases can we trace them to their efficient causes; and in how very few instances do we understand the mode or principle by which

those hidden causes effect the results which we observe ! In short, after all our dogmatizing respecting the usual course of nature, the only universal principle that we can lay down is, that every effect must have had an adequate cause ; and with this relation of cause and effect, the arguments in favour of miracles never interfere. It is, on the contrary, contended, that a peculiar cause was in these instances put into operation, and one fully adequate to the production of the effect. The evidences of which extraordinary interposition are to be found, not only in the miracles themselves, but in collateral directions,—as in the circumstantial fulfilment of prophecy, where the occurrence of the event, and the antecedent delivery of the prediction, rest on the same kind of evidence with the most undoubted historical facts ; the execution of Charles I, or the existence of General Washington.

These observations derive their importance, from the constant and mischievous use which the essayist makes of his definition. Dr. Campbell, however, chiefly confines his reply to that part of the argument which respects the evidence of testimony ; and, on this ground, has produced a refutation which must satisfy every candid and intelligent mind. In the execution of his design, he first demonstrates the fallacy of Mr. Hume's position, that the evidence of testimony is derived solely from experience, by showing, that prior to experience, the declarations of others have a natural and independent influence on our belief. This he illustrates by noticing, that the fullest assent to testimony, however supported, is given by children, and inexperienced persons ; and that increased experience inspires a diffidence rather than confidence in the statements of others. He establishes, that the presumption prior to personal knowledge, is in unison with the testimony, not against it ; and removes the objection, that experience often corrects the misrepresentations of others, by showing, that the same fact is equally true of the reports of our own memory ; though it would be highly absurd to infer from hence, that the evidence of memory is derived from experience. He then adverts to the next principal position taken by the essayist, which he proves to be equally untenable. "When the fact attested," says Mr. Hume, "is such as has seldom fallen under our observation, there is a contest of two opposite experiences, of which the one destroys the other, as far as its force goes, and the superior can only operate upon the mind by the force which remains." After exposing, with great felicity, the show of arithmetical precision exhibited in the above argument, he proposes a case in confutation, the statement of which may be thus abridged. I have lived for some years near a ferry ; I know that the passage-

boat has crossed the river a thousand times, and as often returned safe ; but I have just met an unknown man, who assures me that it has foundered, with all its passengers, before his eyes. Here are, what Mr. Hume would call, opposite experiences. How am I to balance them ? Must I set the two thousand instances on the one side, to the single instance alleged on the other ? In this case, I have nineteen hundred and ninety-nine chances to one that my information is false. Or must I, before I believe it, have two thousand times as much evidence for the single instance, as that which I have for any of the opposite ones ? This is impossible, since for many of them, I have the evidence of my own senses. Or, once more, must the evidence I have of the veracity of the witness, be a full equivalent to the two thousand instances which oppose his statement ? This, again, is out of the question, as the witness is, by the supposition, a perfect stranger. Yet these appear to be the only modes by which the *contrary experiences* can be *balanced*. But, suppose it be said, 'What then, is such weak evidence of testimony incapable of being refuted ?' I reply, by no means ; although the contrary experiences, of which Mr. Hume talks so much, are utterly unable to set it aside. For, first, it may be invalidated by contradictory testimony. The next stranger whom I meet declares, that the whole tale is a fiction, for that he saw the boat and all the passengers come to land in safety. Here is a weight, thrown at once into the opposite scale, of more account than all the two thousand opposite instances put together. My former experience vanishes from my recollection ; my mind hangs in suspense between the two contrary declarations, until it is set at ease by corroborations of the second report, by the next three or four persons whom I meet. Again, though I may not meet with any one who can contradict the original report, the testimony of my informant may be invalidated by individuals who may successively assure me, that he is a notorious liar, and that he is continually forging such reports for the mere purpose of alarming strangers. This, though not so direct a refutation as the former, is a further means of discrediting a testimony. In short, though the direct counter statements, supposed above, may be balanced against each other, as being of a homogeneous kind, yet the two thousand instances and the single instance, cannot be so compared, since they refer to different facts, and though of a contrary nature, are not contradictory, and may therefore both be consistently believed. Lastly, Dr. Campbell argues, that the conclusion from experience is always *general* ; and runs thus—'This is the ordinary course of nature ; such an event may be reasonably expected, where all the circum-

stances are entirely similar.' But this conclusion must, in particular cases, be exceedingly insecure, since, though all the *known* circumstances may be similar, many of the *actual* circumstances may be unknown and dissimilar. On the contrary, the evidence from testimony is always *particular*; and runs thus—'This was the fact in such an individual instance.' The evidence, therefore, resulting from experience, is necessarily so weak, compared with that which results from testimony, that the strongest conviction, built merely on the former, may be overturned by the slightest proof exhibited by the latter. Such is an abstract of that beautiful line of argument, by which the boasted metaphysical theory, constructed by Mr. Hume against the miracles of Christianity, was fairly and finally exploded.* At its first enunciation, it occasioned much perplexity and alarm, to many sincere and even intelligent believers; while it inspired a transitory triumph throughout the ranks of infidelity. Very soon, however, the baseless structure was smitten with that memorable blow under which it fell, and it is now only remembered as one of many instances, in which the proudest champions of scepticism have, after long and loud defiance, done involuntary homage to the majesty of truth, by an ignominious fall, and an irretrievable ruin.

"Thus I have shown," says Dr. Campbell, "as I proposed, that the author's reasoning proceeds on a false hypothesis.—It supposes testimony to derive its evidence solely from experience, which is false.—It supposes by consequence, that contrary observations have a weight in opposing testimony, which the first and most acknowledged principles of human reason, or, if you like the term better, common sense, evidently shows that they have not.—It assigns a rule for discovering the superiority of contrary evidences, which, in

* A curious exemplification of that logical acuteness, in which Dr. Campbell so far surpassed his opponent, occurs in the following note, introduced in his first section.

"I shall here take the liberty, though the matter be not essential to the design of this tract, to correct an oversight in the Essayist, who always supposes, that, where contrary evidences must be balanced, the probability lies in the remainder or surplus, when the less number is subtracted from the greater. The probability does not consist in the surplus, but in the ratio, or geometrical proportion, which the numbers on the opposite sides bear to each other. I explain myself thus. In favour of one supposed event there are 100 similar instances, against it 50. In another case under consideration, the favourable instances are 60, and only 10 unfavourable. Though the difference, or arithmetical proportion, which is 50, be the same in both cases, the probability is by no means equal, as the author's way of reasoning implies. The probability of the first event is as 100 to 50, or 2 to 1. The probability of the second is as 60 to 10, or 6 to one. Consequently, on comparing the different examples, though both be probable, the second is thrice as probable as the first."

the latitude there given it, tends to mislead the judgment, and which it is impossible, by any explication, to render of real use."

Having disposed of the sophistical position, on which Mr. Hume founded the abstract and most formidable portion of his reasoning against miracles, as an evidence of Christianity, Dr. Campbell animadverts upon his opponent's method of conducting his argument; and convicts him, in several instances, of a degree of logical incapacity, if not of intentional guile, as flagrant as any that can be found in the entire compass of the deistical writings.

For example, he has two distinct, and even opposite uses, for the term experience, on which so much of his argument turns; and, hence, he is enabled dexterously to shift its application from one thing to another, until his reader is either convinced or totally bewildered. "It is a miracle," says Mr. Hume, "that a dead man should come to life, because that has never been observed in any age or country. There must, therefore, be a uniform experience against every miraculous event, otherwise that event would not merit that appellation." Here he plainly intimates, that there can only be a uniform experience against such events as have never been observed in any age or country. He is not, therefore, referring in this place to personal experience (which is the only rendering that can give force or meaning to some other branches of his argument), since personal experience does not extend to "every age and country." The greater part of this "experience," therefore, is solely the result of *testimony*; and his argument, therefore, resolves itself into the following ludicrous paradox—"Testimony is not entitled to the least degree of faith, but as far as it is supported by such an extensive experience as, if we had not had a previous and independent faith in testimony, we could never have acquired." Again—"A miracle," says he, "is a violation of the laws of nature, and, as a firm and unalterable experience hath established these laws, the proof against a miracle is as entire as any argument from experience can possibly be imagined." The conciseness and consecutiveness of such passages as these—the logical form into which Mr. Hume casts his grossest blunders—is at first sight somewhat startling; but, let it be remembered, that this "experience," which he terms "firm and unalterable," and, in another place, "uniform," has been already shown to depend almost entirely upon testimony: but this same testimony is *our* warrant for the truth of those very miracles against which he is contending. So that Mr. Hume appears, with all this show of demonstration, to have simply fallen into that blunder, or rather crept into that fallacy, so well known to young beginners in logic, under the name of "begging the question!"

The Dr. next alludes to a distinction, artfully suggested by Mr. Hume, between events that are "contrary to our experience," and such as are "not conformable to it;" the latter of which, he admits, are capable of proof by testimony. A number of passages are then cited, from the essay itself, in which the author manifestly uses the terms as mutually interchangeable, and even demonstrates that they are entirely synonymous. He further puts side by side—"I own there may possibly be miracles, or violations of the ordinary course of nature, of such a kind as may admit a proof from human testimony;" and, in another place, "No testimony can ever possibly amount to a probability, much less to a proof." Again, by a comparison of two or three other passages, he deduces a still more ridiculous contradiction. "Suppose," says the essayist, "all authors, in all languages, agree that, from the first of January, 1600, there was a total darkness over the whole earth for eight days; suppose that the tradition of this extraordinary event is still strong and lively among the people—that all travellers, who return from foreign countries, bring us account of the same tradition, without the least variation or contradiction; it is evident that our present philosophers, instead of doubting of that fact, ought to receive it for certain, and ought to search for the causes whence it may be derived." Now, before the author could believe such a miracle as this, he must at least be satisfied that the proof of it from testimony, is stronger than the proof against it from experience; but, we have already seen, that "from the very nature of the fact, there is as *direct* and *full* a proof against the existence of any miracle as can possibly be imagined." Whence, then, does testimony derive the evidence which can overturn such a proof as this? The reply is, in Mr. Hume's own words, "Testimony hath no evidence, but what it derives from experience; these differ from each other, only as the species from the genus." Let us then substitute for "Testimony" its admitted equivalent, "Experience," and Mr. Hume's argument for his eight days of darkness, assumes the following beautiful and irrefragable form: "THERE IS A PROOF OF IT FROM EXPERIENCE, WHICH IS SUPERIOR TO AS ENTIRE A PROOF FROM EXPERIENCE AS CAN POSSIBLY BE IMAGINED!"

Having thus triumphantly defeated the most celebrated of Mr. Hume's deistical arguments, namely that against all miracles whatsoever, Dr. Campbell proceeds, in the following sections, to notice severally those which respect the miracles recorded in the Bible. In the fourth section of the first part of his book, he shows there is no peculiar presumption against those which are said to have been wrought in support of religion. This he substantiates, by refuting

Mr. Hume's opinion, that all such relations are to be accounted for by two powerful passions of the human mind, the passion for the marvellous, and the religious affection. With respect to the first of these, he shows that the presumption arising from it, against historical accounts of miracles is no greater than that against any other extraordinary phenomena—of electricity, chemistry, or magnetism, before such phenomena has been verified by experience; yet the application of Mr. Hume's principle, in these cases, would be obviously absurd, and would arrest the progress of every department of science, by interposing the barrier of universal scepticism. With respect, again, to the religious affection, he proves, that this principle tends as much to obstruct as to promote our belief in any given religious miracle, since no two things in nature are more diametrically opposite, than some systems of religious belief. Before, then, any force can be allowed to this latter argument, he must prove, that the religious tenets of those who testify to the Christian miracles, were in unison with the doctrines they were wrought to attest; in other words, that their religious zeal and prejudice would have biassed them in favour of the preternatural power of those who performed them. But, unfortunately, the very contrary of this is the case. These very miracles produced a conviction, in their minds, contrary to any which they had previously entertained; and, consequently, effected this result, not in consequence, but in spite of that "religious affection," to whose mighty influence Mr. Hume attributes their credulity. In his fifth, he further shows, that there is a peculiar presumption in favour of the Christian miracles, on account of the vast—the infinite interests involved in that system, which they attest; a principle of reasoning, which not only approves itself to a Christian advocate, but which is founded on an independent and obvious fitness, insomuch that it is recognised by a heathen poet and critic.*

The remainder of the first part of the Dr.'s performance is devoted to an examination of the general principle, adopted by Mr. Hume, in cases in which an overwhelming weight of evidence, seems to establish something of an extraordinary and miraculous kind. In such cases, the essayist lays down as a canon, "That the probability of the fact, is in the inverse ratio of the quantity of miracle there is in it." "I weigh," says he, "the one miracle against the other, and, according to the superiority which I observe, I pronounce my decision, and always reject the greater miracle." In reply, the doctor exposes the absurdity which this principle involves, namely,

* *Nec Deus intersit nisi dignus vindice nodus
Inciderit.*

that it is more probable that God should interpose his power, in the slightest possible degrees, and for the most frivolous purposes, than that he should exert it, with the majesty becoming a God, to subserve the highest and eternal interests of his servants, and his sons.

The first part closes, by resolving, with the most perfect fairness, the principle which Mr. Hume lays down, at the close of the first part of his essay, as its grand sum and corollary, into the following position: "*That no testimony is sufficient to establish a miracle; unless the testimony be of such a kind, that its falsehood would be more improbable than the fact which it endeavours to establish!*" We frequently find Mr. Hume arguing in a circle, in the minor portions of his celebrated treatise; we learn, however, from the above conclusion, that this spinning motion is natural and necessary to his mental operations—that, in fact, the instances referred to are but diurnal rotations in a vast circular orbit. After accomplishing a vast circuit in quest of singularities and paradoxes, he returns, it seems, to the precise point from which he set out—to one of the most elemental and intuitive truths which the early dawn of reason discloses to the perception of infancy.

The second part of Dr. Campbell's masterly dissertation, as it dwells more upon detail than upon great and disputed principles, requires only a cursory notice. Its substance will be found in the following synopsis. There is no presumption arising from human nature, against the miracles said to have been wrought in proof of Christianity; for, if it be objected, that the belief of the early proselytes may be attributed to credulity and enthusiasm, inspired by the eloquence, fervour, or sanctity of the founders of a new religion, it may be replied, that even if this were true of a few early converts, it could not account for the accession of multitudes, continuing through successive generations, including men of the soundest and most searching order of mind, and embracing many of all ranks, conditions, and characters. That further, we have no counter testimony, from the numerous and inveterate enemies of these early proselytes, notwithstanding the direct appeals made to them on this subject by the apostles; on the contrary, they admitted that notable miracles had been wrought among them. Further, although we find enthusiasts mistaken as to the origin of certain impulses of which they are conscious, yet we never find a multitude of men, however enthusiastic, alike mistaken as to the testimony of their own senses. How then can they have been mistaken as to the resurrection and ascension of Christ? In short, as absurdity is ever the last

refuge of *scepticism*, the most *unbelieving* appear to be those, who believe that the persons who were deceived, as to these great events, were the very men who stole and concealed the body of their Master. Nor is it less absurd to imagine that the apostles, though undeceived themselves, were confederated to deceive the rest of the world; since, apart from the high improbability, that the infamous secret should have been kept inviolate among a multitude of knaves, every motive, which can actuate to so audacious an enterprise, was wanting; and nothing but penury, disgrace, and destruction awaited those who embraced and propagated the Gospel. Nor is there any presumption, arising from the history of mankind, against the genuineness of the Christian miracles. So far from men in all ages having been imposed upon, as Mr. Hume boldly asserts, by ridiculous stories of miracles, ascribed to new systems of religion, the religion of the Bible is the only religion extant which claims to have been recommended, at its first publication, by the evidence of miracles. Few enthusiasts, of any age or country, have dared to advance such a plea; and wherever they have had the boldness to recur to it, it has proved the bane, and not the support, of their cause. Moreover, the miracles alleged to have been wrought among pagan nations, by no means detract from the evidence afforded to the truth of Christianity, by the miracles of Scripture; and this for several reasons. Many of them, for example, may be explained on natural principles, by the subsequent discoveries of science. None of them were wrought in corroboration of claims to inspiration, or in proof of the authenticity of a revelation. On the contrary, they were performed, whenever they had any reference to religion, in confirmation of a system already established, and generally received, and not in attestation of a new and, therefore, aggressive religion. Above all, there is a character of meanness, jugglery, and concealment attaching to all other miracles, and a paucity and partiality of evidence attesting them, which strikingly contrasts with the undisguised openness of the Christian miracles, the universal assent of enemies to their genuineness, and the transparent simplicity and good faith of the writers by whom they are recorded. This convincing contrast, Dr. Campbell has developed in an extended and searching examination of the popish and pagan miracles adduced by Mr. Hume; and justly concludes, from the whole examination, that the lustre of the Gospel miracles is vastly enhanced, by comparison with the paltry counterfeits of them, exhibited both in ancient and modern times.

The next point demonstrated is, that, apart from the evidence for particular facts, we have the clearest proof of the occurrence of some

events, which, as being unconformable and opposite to the present course of nature, and the experience of mankind, must, even on Mr. Hume's definitions, be deemed miraculous. The instance chiefly dwelt upon, is the creation of the human species, and, by inference, of the universe itself. The only opposing hypothesis, is that of an eternal succession of generations of mankind; a supposition, by which the eternity of existence ascribed by theists to one infinite Being, is transferred to an unbeginning series of finite creatures. This notion the Dr. opposes, by pointing to the early barbarism of all nations; the late invention of letters, sciences, and arts; the known origin of many states and kingdoms; and the first peopling of many countries. The comparative recentness and rapidity of the progress which mankind have made, from a state of total barbarism and ignorance, to the heights of civilization and science which they now occupy, he justly infers to be inconsistent with the bare and fantastic hypothesis, of the existence of the species from eternity.

While noticing this part of the deistical controversy, it may not be unseasonable to digress for a moment, in order to introduce an argument on the subject, which occurs in a sermon on Modern Infidelity, by the late Rev. Robert Hall. The entire treatise, is confessedly one of the most masterly exhibitions of the ennobling and blessed tendency of the Christian religion, and of the debasing and destructive influence of scepticism, and, at the same time, one of the sublimest efforts of genius which our literature can boast.

"When we examine a watch," says he, "or any other piece of machinery, we instantly perceive marks of design. The arrangement of its several parts, and the adaptation of its movements to one result, show it to be a contrivance; nor do we ever imagine the faculty of contriving to be in the watch itself, but in a separate agent. If we turn from art to nature, we behold a vast magazine of contrivances; we see innumerable objects replete with the most exquisite design. The human eye, for example, is formed with admirable skill for the purpose of sight, the ear, for the function of hearing. As in the productions of art we never think of ascribing the power of contrivance to the machine itself, so we are certain the skill displayed in the human structure is not a property of man, since he is very imperfectly acquainted with his own formation. If there be an inseparable relation betwixt the ideas of a contrivance and a contriver; and it be evident, in regard to the human structure, the designing agent is not man himself, there must undeniably be some separate invisible being, who is his former. This great Being we mean to indicate by the appellation of Deity.

"This reasoning admits but of one reply. Why, it will be said,

may we not suppose the world has always continued as it is ; that is, that there has been a constant succession of finite beings, appearing and disappearing on the earth from all eternity ? I answer, whatever is supposed to have occasioned this constant succession, exclusive of an intelligent cause, will never account for the undeniable marks of design visible in all finite beings. Nor is the absurdity of supposing a contrivance without a contriver diminished by this imaginary succession ; but rather increased, by being repeated at every step of the series.*

" Besides, an eternal succession of finite beings involves in it a contradiction, and is therefore plainly impossible. As the supposition is made to get quit of the idea of any one having existed from eternity, each of the beings in the succession must have begun in time : but the succession itself is eternal. We have then the succession of beings infinitely earlier than any being in the succession ; or, in other words, a series of beings running on, *ad infinitum*, before it reached any particular being, which is absurd.

" From these considerations it is manifest there must be some eternal Being, or nothing could ever have existed : and since the beings which we behold bear in their whole structure evident marks of wisdom and design, it is equally certain that he who formed them is a wise and intelligent agent.

" To prove the unity of this great Being, in opposition to a plurality of Gods, it is not necessary to have recourse to metaphysical abstractions. It is sufficient to observe, that the notion of more than one author of nature is inconsistent with that harmony of design which pervades her works ; that it explains no appearances,

* This paragraph has been introduced, in order to present an entire view of Mr. Hall's reasoning. It is by no means necessary to the support of the writer's position, which was completely established in the preceding paragraph ; besides which, it appears to me utterly unsatisfactory and fallacious. I conceive that the source of the error lies in the term "*each*," as predicated in the first branch of the argument of an infinite succession. A moment's reflection will show, that this term necessarily implies known limits, and is therefore plainly inapplicable, even in hypothesis, to an infinite series. From this results the erroneous distinction between eternity and time—the latter of which is as conventional a division of the former, as an hour is of a year. The subsequent fallacies in this line of reasoning, the reader will easily trace to those which have been pointed out ; and the ludicrous conclusion to which the author is led, derives its poignancy, less from any inherent absurdity in the speculation which he opposes, than to the vital error involved in his first position. It is impossible to attribute the slightest degree of intentional unfairness to a writer who, like Mr. Hall, united the candour of philosophy with the majesty of genius. We should rather regard this as one of many instances which have come under our notice, in this introduction, of the inadequacy of mere metaphysical reasoning to establish those truths, on which the only rays of infallible light are shed, from a simple, a scanty, and a dogmatic revelation.—C. R. E.

is supported by no evidence, and serves no purpose, but to embarrass and perplex our conceptions.

"Such are the proofs of the existence of that great and glorious Being whom we denominate God ; and it is not presumption to say, it is impossible to find another truth in the whole compass of morals, which, according to the justest laws of reasoning, admits of such strict and rigorous demonstration."

Dr. Campbell closes the dissertation which has thus passed under review, and which may be regarded as an almost perfect specimen of candid, perspicuous, and triumphant controversy, with some observations on Mr. Hume's examination of the Pentateuch. Here he first adduces Mr. Hume's own remark, that polytheism and idolatry are invariably found among rude and ancient nations ; and thus infers the genuineness of the divine revelation, given in the Pentateuch, to the early inhabitants of the world, from the purity of their religious belief. He next exposes the falsehood of one of the Essayist's remarks, that the book was probably written long after the events it relates ; and the curious absurdity of another, " that it was supported by no concurring testimony," a circumstance obviously precluded, as most children are aware, by its long priority to any other written document. He adduces, as collateral evidence of its truth, the prevalence, among many remote nations, of the division of time into weeks, and of various traditions, which are evidently corruptions of the relations given by Moses ; and finally offers a variety of analogical arguments in favour of the antecedent probability of the miracles recorded, and of the general credibility of the document. In closing, the Dr. animadvert upon a sort of final position of the Essayist, which indicates a degree of fatuity and incapacity of reasoning, scarcely exceeded in any part even of the Essay on Miracles. It is as follows, " Upon the whole, we may conclude, that the *Christian religion* not only was at first attended with miracles, but, even at this day, cannot be believed by any reasonable person without one. Mere reason is insufficient to convince us of its veracity ; and whoever is moved by faith to assent to it ;" that is, whoever by his belief is induced to believe it, " is conscious of a continued miracle in his own person, which subverts all the principles of his understanding, and gives him a determination to believe what is most contrary to custom and experience." " If any meaning," says Dr. Campbell, " can be gathered from that strange assemblage of words just now quoted, it seems to be one or other of these which follow : *either*, That there are not any in the world who believe the gospel ; *or*, That there is no want of miracles in our own time. How either of these remarks, if just, can contribute to

the author's purpose, it will not, I suspect, be easy to discover. If the second remark be true, if there be no want of miracles at present, surely experience cannot be pleaded against the belief of miracles said to have been performed in time past. Again, if the first remark be true, if there be not any in the world who believe the gospel, because, as Mr. Hume supposes, a miracle cannot be believed without a new miracle, why all this ado to refute opinions which nobody entertains?"

Mr. Hume's treatise, respecting the authenticity and genuineness of the Pentateuch, received a far more searching and severe examination, in a little book entitled *Letters on Infidelity*, published at first anonymously, and in a subsequent edition with the name of its author, Dr. George Horne, Bishop of Norwich. It commences with a letter to Dr. Adam Smith, the apologist for the life and writings of Mr. Hume, written in a style of the happiest satire; it dwells more upon the details, than upon the general principles of Mr. Hume's sceptical writings; but it convicts him, throughout, of the grossest fallacies in reasoning, of the most infamous licentiousness in his system of morals, and of the utmost ignorance and incapacity in his criticisms on the sacred writings. It exhibits, in every page, some learning, and the most pointed and effective ridicule; and is, perhaps, on the whole, as well calculated as any work on the subject, to remove those sceptical tendencies which Mr. Hume communicated to weak and wavering minds, by the beauties of his style, and the dogmatical impudence of his assertions.

It may, perhaps, be thought, that a somewhat disproportionate degree of attention has been bestowed, in this introduction, to the deistical writings of Mr. Hume, and the apologies for Christianity to which they gave occasion. The reason for this is, that he has employed, in opposition to Christianity, a more formidable degree of ingenuity, research, and literary influence, than any writer who falls within that period of the controversy now under review. Before dismissing him, the writer deems it important to notice a single passage in one of his private letters, which shows, that with all his industry, virulence, and buffoonery, he was himself heartily ashamed of the opinions he propagated. In a letter addressed to Dr. Hugh Blair, when alluding, with every symptom of conscious defeat, to Dr. Campbell's dissertation, he says, "I could wish your friend had not denominated me an infidel writer, on account of ten or twelve pages which seem to him to have that tendency, while I have wrote so many volumes on history, literature, politics, trade, morals, which, in that particular at least, are entirely inoffensive. Is a man to be called a drunkard because he has been seen fuddled once in his life

time?" In what a melancholy, in what an ineffably despicable position, does this sentence exhibit the boasted champion of modern infidelity! What! we exclaim, does HE shrink from the denomination of an infidel writer, who has employed all his talents and learning in perverting the Old Testament, and invalidating the New?—who has despised Moses and the prophets, and calumniated Christ and his apostles—who has habitually ridiculed the miracles, discredited the histories, maligned the tendency, and blasphemed the author of the Bible? What, then, means the application of such language as this to Christianity—"the modern European superstition," "the virulent poison," "the cruel enemy," "the inhuman tyrant," that "chiefly contributes to render life miserable?" Whence, then, Mr. Hume's elaborate defence of suicide, adultery, and every crime which can deface the species, till, instead of the image of God, they retain only the image of man? And why, too, that heart-sickening effort to deaden the pangs of a death-bed without hope, by his Lucian, and his whist, and those saddest of jokes about Charon and his boat? This is the man who slinks away from the charge of infidelity; and, having never exhibited either the modesty or the integrity of the philosopher, abandons his last claim to that character, by disowning all interest in the grandest principles he has adopted and maintained.

It might have been supposed, that the complete refutation with which Mr. Hume's Essay on Miracles had been met, by Campbell and others, would have finally destroyed that line of attack; subsequently, however, such varied arguments have been employed in defence of the Christian revelation, that modern sceptics have been compelled to bestir themselves to corresponding exertions; and, as new arguments have become somewhat scarce, they have betaken themselves to such as had been already exploded, with some slight changes in their mode of presenting and illustrating them. Accordingly, the doctrine of Hume, that *miracles cannot be proved by any testimony*, was revived by La Place, the celebrated French astronomer, in his work *Sur les Probabilités*, and supported in an elaborate criticism in the Edinburgh Review, No. 46, universally attributed to Professor Leslie. This critique, and the reasoning of La Place, which occasioned it, were answered with great ability and entire success, by the Rev. James Somerville, in a treatise which demands a moment's attention in this place. The language of La Place has been translated as follows. "Events may be so extraordinary, that they can *hardly* be established by any testimony. We would *not* give credit to a man who affirmed that he had seen an hundred dice thrown into the air, and all fall on the same faces.

If we ourselves had been spectators of such an event, we would not believe our own eyes, till we had scrupulously examined all the circumstances, and assured ourselves that there was no trick nor deception. After such examination, we would not hesitate to admit it, notwithstanding its great improbability; and no one would have recourse to an inversion of the laws of vision, in order to account for it. This shows, that the probability of the continuance of the laws of nature is superior, in our estimation, to every other evidence, and to that of historical facts the best established. One may, therefore, judge of the weight of testimony necessary to prove a suspension of the laws of nature, and how fallacious it is, in such cases, to apply the common rules of evidence."

After noticing the looseness of the author's expressions, as to "hardly believing" and "not believing," Mr. Somerville addresses himself to the first proposition, namely, that we would not believe a man who said that he had seen an hundred dice fall on the same faces. This fundamental position he shows to be a *petitio principii*, a very favourite mode of reasoning, as we have seen, with modern sceptics, since the credibility of testimony to extraordinary events is precisely the point in dispute. In showing this, however, he corrects one previous error, which, so long as it remained, rendered the above position totally irrelevant to the question, one way or the other. "*We would not believe a man,*" says La Place. This is admitted on all hands. The question is not, whether any *one man's* testimony is sufficient to establish a miracle, or an extraordinary event, but whether *any conceivable concurrence and weight of testimony* is sufficient for that purpose. Having made this alteration, in order to give the slightest force and relevancy to the remark, it exchanges the character of a truism for that of a falsehood: for by *we* the writer evidently intends mankind in general; but it is an undeniable fact, that mankind have, in all ages, believed the most extraordinary occurrences on what they regarded as valid testimony.

The second position, namely, that we would believe our own eyes in the matter of the dice, may be suffered to pass as innocent; but the reason assigned by the astronomer, for our confidence in the evidence of our eye-sight (which may be regarded as the next step in the argument) is also shown to be false, viz. our confidence in the immutability of the laws of vision. We are confident of no such thing. On the contrary, we know that a variety of physical derangements *do* disturb the ordinary laws of vision. The ground of our confidence, as must appear from a moment's reflection, is that, *in this particular instance*, they have not been interrupted; a fact easily, and even involuntarily, verified by observation of all other

objects around. So that the conclusion falls to the ground; and only leaves us surprised, that the great philosopher should so mistake his vocation, as to apply his theory of chances to subjects which it could not possibly elucidate.

The reasoning of Professor Leslie admits of an equally easy refutation. Having fallen still more flagrantly into the erroneous assumption of Mr. Hume, that all our knowledge of the ordinary phenomena of nature is *experience* (a term which can only be used with propriety in reference to our own personal observation, all other knowledge being manifestly derived from *testimony*); and having next assumed, with about equal truth, that *experience* in these matters is *perfectly uniform*; he concludes that *no testimony* can prevail against it. "A most unquestionable truth, without doubt," replies Mr. Somerville, "if his premises are granted, and far from requiring the metaphysical talents of Hume, or the mathematical powers of La Place, or his reviewer, to establish. For if experience be uniform, that experience must consist of the personal experience of every individual of the human race, in every age. Nothing less can constitute uniform experience; and if there be uniform experience on any point whatever, it is plain that no testimony can prevail against it; for this obvious reason, that no person could possibly be found giving such testimony. The uniformity of experience, which is assumed as the very basis of the argument, precludes the possibility of any opposite testimony. The proposition, therefore, which assumes that no testimony can prevail against uniformity of experience, is a mere childish truism."

The reason for the confusion of experience and testimony, on the part of modern sceptics, is clearly pointed out by this ingenious writer. Real experience furnished too narrow ground for such an extensive conclusion as they wished to draw. Had they justly restricted the application of the term experience, and designated as testimony every thing prior and collateral, they would have been deprived of the plausible ground of opposing testimony to uniform experience; and, instead of saying, that no testimony is to be credited against uniform experience, they would have only been able to argue, that no testimony is to be credited against uniform testimony, a proposition too harmless to require any attention. Had they apportioned to testimony its rightful province, it would have followed, that the statement respecting miracles, and those concerning the laws of nature, as standing on the same ground, namely that of testimony, must all be tried by the same laws, the laws by which testimony is tried.

It would scarcely be worth while to bestow even a moment's

attention on the effusions of so inapt a reasoner on moral subjects as the learned Reviewer, but for the sake of noticing, and claiming for Christianity, the most singular of the arguments of La Place, which bears on the subjects of miracles—an argument which overthrows Mr. Hume's deistical school from the very foundation, burying together in the rubbish Professor Leslie, La Place, and an undistinguished mob of little disciples, "*quos fama obscura recondit.*" It will be recollected, that Mr. Hume's statement is, *that no testimony, for any kind of miracle, can ever possibly amount to a probability, much less to a proof;*"—a position which, together with the whole theory with which it stands connected, is warmly enlogized by the Edinburgh Reviewer, and attributed to the historian as its sole and original author. It should further be borne in mind, that no less absolute or modified form of presenting this dogma will in any degree serve the purpose for which it is designed; since, if any kind or degree of evidence, short of that of personal observation, could establish the possibility of a violation of the laws of nature, it would become necessary for the impugners of the Scripture miracles to examine, in detail, the evidence of all kinds by which they are supported, and to demonstrate its inadequacy. To such a process the sceptical school in question are remarkably disinclined; and they therefore confine their opposition to the most abstract and metaphysical forms of argument. Bearing these considerations in mind, let the reader listen for a moment to the mathematicians.

"Supposing, with M. LA PLACE, that the greatest antiquity to which history goes back is 5000 years, or 1826213 days, the probability that the sun will rise again to-morrow is, according to this rule, as $\frac{1826214}{1826215}$; or there is 1826214 to 1 to wager in favour of that event."

This obviously implies, that if a person should wager more, as, for instance, a hundred millions to one, he would act against the laws of probability. Here it is clearly shown, that there is not only "*a possibility,*" but some *probability*, of the sun not rising to-morrow; it is indeed small, but it is appreciable and definable. And how will the sceptic attempt to prove, that an event which is not only possible, but, to a certain measurable degree, *probable* to occur to-morrow, cannot, by any evidence, be established to have happened in any *past* period? "If he say," argues Mr. Somerville, "that it is in itself impossible, we deny it upon his own showing; for he has proved that it is possible, and even to a certain degree probable. If he say that uniform experience is against it, we deny it, and say, that only the experience of the present generation is against it. If he say that uniform testimony is against it, this we

deny also ; for it is testified, by the author of the book of Joshua, that in his time the sun stood still for a whole day ; and there is no testimony at all on the other side, as applicable to that particular day. The same observations may be applied to all the miracles recorded in Scripture. Experience is not applicable to them, for it is limited to the objects under our notice ; and testimony is so far from being against them, that there is testimony for them, and *none* against them. Many persons testify that they saw them happen, and none testify that they were upon the spot, and examined all the circumstances, and saw that they did not happen. As to the testimony of those who were not there, however *uniform* it might be, it does not bear at all on the subject. *The principles of calculation*, therefore, are more in support of miracles than against them." Truly this is smiting off the head of the giant *with his own sword* !

The next and only writer, after the days of Hume, who brought to the cause of infidelity a high and deserved reputation for philosophy and letters, was Mr. Gibbon, the celebrated historian of the decline and fall of the Roman Empire. His opposition to the cause of Christianity, was marked by less both of zeal and subtlety than the writings of Mr. Hume evinced. The latter wrote in the character of a philosopher, and regarded those as his best and most characteristic works which related to morals and religion. Mr. Gibbon, on the contrary, offered to revealed religion only the hostility of the historian and the scholar. Accordingly, he is only known, in the ranks of deistical writers, by two chapters in his historical work, in which he details the rise and progress of Christianity, and the causes which, in his opinion, contributed to its prevalence. Nothing could be more artfully and courteously disguised, than was the thread of infidelity in this portion of his history ; and while he habitually indicates a deep veneration for that vast but silent agency, which achieved a domination over mankind, far more powerful than did the arts of senators, and the swords of the Cæsars—while he recognizes the superior sublimity of that intellectual and spiritual empire, over mere physical and territorial supremacy, he repeatedly ascribes it, by sly implication, to causes the most ordinary and inadequate, and thus depreciates the dignity of its nature, and veils the divinity of its origin. The immediate effect of these chapters, was only to inspire a suspicion of the orthodoxy of the writer ; but it was not long before the Christian world settled into a deep and serious conviction of the injury which they threatened to the cause of religion. The effect of this general impression was much enhanced, by the alarming prevalence of infidel opinions. Scepticism, upon the most sacred of subjects, had of late ceased to be the ex-

clusive distinction of philosophers. Availing themselves of the spread of education, and favoured by external and political events, its votaries had succeeded in extending its influence, and in impregnating with its poison every rank of society. The Christian church was naturally, or rather providentially, alarmed, by the new species of opposition which she had to encounter. Her champions and her hosts were aroused; and to their energies she owes those recent but impregnable defences with which she is now encompassed. Accordingly, a number of writers in defence of Christianity, too great for any but a merely nominal mention, appeared to answer the aspersions of Mr. Gibbon, against the truths of revealed religion. In presenting a brief analysis of the controversy, as conducted by them, it may not be improper to quote the arrogant terms in which the historian himself, in his memoirs of his life and writings, condescended to notice them. "Had I believed," he says, "that the majority of English readers were so fondly attached even to the name and shadow of Christianity—had I foreseen that the pious, the timid, and the prudent would feel, or affect to feel, with such exquisite sensibility, I might perhaps have softened the two invidious chapters, which would create many enemies, and conciliate few friends. But the shaft was shot, the alarm was sounded, and I could only rejoice, that, if the voice of our priests was clamorous and bitter, their hands were disarmed from the powers of persecution. I adhered to the wise resolution of trusting myself and my writings to the candour of the public, till Mr. Davis, of Oxford, presumed to attack, not the faith, but the fidelity of the historian. My vindication, expressive of less anger than contempt, amused for a moment the busy and idle metropolis; and the most rational part of the laity, and even of the clergy, appear to have been satisfied of my innocence and accuracy. I would not print this vindication in quarto, lest it should be bound and preserved with the history itself. At the distance of twelve years, I calmly affirm my judgment of Davis, Chelsum, &c. A victory over such antagonists was a sufficient humiliation. They, however, were rewarded in this world. Poor Chelsum was indeed neglected; and I dare not boast the making Dr. Watson a Bishop; he is a prelate of large mind and liberal spirit: but I enjoyed the privilege of giving a royal pension to Mr. Davis, and of collating Dr. Apthorpe to an archiepiscopal living. Their success encouraged the zeal of Taylor the Arian, and Milner the Methodist, with many others whom it would be difficult to remember, and tedious to rehearse. The list of my adversaries was graced, however, by the more respectable names of Dr. Priestley,

Sir David Dalrymple,* and Dr. White ; and every polemic, of either university, discharged his sermon or pamphlet against the impenetrable silence of the Roman Historian." After some more particular notice of the publications of the last-mentioned persons—characterized by the same superciliousness and vanity—Mr. Gibbon concludes as follows : " Let me frankly own that I was startled at the first discharge of Ecclesiastical ordnance ; but, as soon as I found that this empty noise was mischievous only in the intention, my fear was converted into indignation, and every feeling of indignation or curiosity has since subsided in pure and placid indifference."

The passages in Mr. Gibbon's Historical Work, which gave rise to so much controversy, are to be found in the fifteenth and sixteenth chapters, which are devoted to the early progress of the Christian religion. " Our curiosity is naturally prompted," says he, " to inquire by what means the Christian faith obtained so remarkable a victory over the established religions of the earth. To this inquiry, an obvious but satisfactory answer may be returned ; that it was owing to the convincing evidence of the doctrine itself, and the ruling providence of its great Author." Perhaps it was this single passage which more than any other necessitated the active opposition of the world to the succeeding remarks. Nothing could be more disingenuous, or more dangerous, than this curious observation. It seems to indicate the justest views and the most stable and enlightened faith ; of both of which, the sequel of his examination proves him to be utterly destitute. Having laid down this primary principle, he proceeds to detail what he terms the secondary causes which favoured the growth of the Christian church. These he conjectures to have been the following :

1. The inflexible and, if we may use the expression, the intolerant zeal of the Christians, derived, it is true, from the Jewish religion, but purified from the narrow and unsocial spirit, which, instead of inviting, had deterred the Gentiles from embracing the laws of Moses.
2. The doctrine of a future life improved by every additional circumstance which could give weight and efficacy to that important truth.
3. The miraculous powers ascribed to the primitive church.
4. The pure and austere morals of the Christians.
5. The union and discipline of the Christian republic, which

* Afterwards Lord Hailes.

gradually formed an independent and increasing state in the heart of the Roman empire.

These reasons are, indeed, prescribed by Mr. Gibbon as secondary; but, throughout his treatise he so systematically passes over that primary agency which, in the commencement he refers to, as giving all their efficiency to the subsidiary causes, and further, so continually throws out sly, unfair, and intangible insinuations against the truths of revelation generally, as to make it evident that he deemed the "five causes" as primary and self-sufficient, and was only studious to adopt the most effectual, but least alarming mode of disseminating his scepticism.

It was to these allegations, therefore, that Dr. Watson chiefly confined his opposition, in his celebrated "Apology for Christianity"—a work which impressed the historian with a higher opinion of its author, than he entertained of any other of his opponents; although it is unquestionable, that Mr. Davis gave him by far the most uneasiness, by attacking his historical "fidelity," while the other only impugned what he amusingly denominates his *faith*.

In replying to the first cause to which Mr. Gibbon traces the spread of Christianity, Dr. Watson does not notice the obvious singularity of attributing *intolerance* to the unprotected feebleness of the early church—a figure of speech analogous to that by which we should ascribe sparing mercy to a couple of newborn lambs, surrounded by a troop of snarling and misbehaving wolves. Nor does he remark on the absurdity of supposing, that "the ruling providence of the great author" would have approved and employed such an agency—a lapse of memory on the part of Mr. Gibbon, apparent in one or two other of the "five causes." He chiefly confines himself to the source from which the historian derives the zeal of the early church, convicts him of ignorance and error in identifying it with the zealous exclusiveness of the Jewish system, to which the whole design and spirit of the Christian religion was essentially hostile, exposes his insensibility to, or wilful contempt of, the influence of that doctrine, to whose evidence he, in a moment of incautious orthodoxy, had attributed the triumphs of the cross, and points to the principles and promises of the gospel, as the only means by which that "inflexible zeal" could have been kindled and sustained.

In concluding his first letter he animadverts upon a seemingly incidental statement of Mr. Gibbon, that "the contemporaries of Moses and Joshua had beheld with careless indifference, the most amazing miracles; and that, *in contradiction to every known prin-*

ciple of the human mind, the Jews *seem* to have yielded a more ready assent to the traditions of their remote ancestors, than to the evidence of their own senses." In reply, the Doctor confutes both of the allegations, by several facts and arguments, and exposes, though not so fully and pointedly as he might have done, the latent bearing which it has against the veracity of the Old Testament Scriptures.

The second cause alleged by Mr. Gibbon as having contributed to the early advancement of Christianity, is the doctrine of the immortality of the soul, "improved," as he expresses it, "by every additional circumstance which could give weight and efficacy to that important truth." Unfortunately, however, Dr. Watson clearly shows, that the additions "to this important doctrine," as received by the pagans, were by no means calculated to give "weight and efficacy" to it; but, on the contrary, were adapted to repel them from its adoption. The bare notion of a future state, was not an innovation upon the heathen mythology. The novelty consisted in the doctrine of probation and responsibility, and the resurrection of the dead; and this, as connected with eternal punishment as the consequence of their habitually cherished vices, was very unlikely to attract them to the ranks of Christianity. He next opposes the historian's suggestion, that the Gentiles were converted by their fears of Christ's second coming, of the final judgment, and the general conflagration—showing, first, that the mere declarations of a few despised and ignorant men, were utterly inadequate to inspire those fears; and further that, notwithstanding the frequent use of such terms as, "We who are alive and remain," the apostles themselves did not expect the second advent of their Master, but, on the contrary, speak of their own approaching decease, in language which clearly indicates the opposite opinion. The various prophecies contained in the epistles, which point to future and remote corruptions of Christianity, and which are universally believed to have had their fulfilment in the prevalence of the popish religion, more fully establish this point. In noticing the third cause adduced by Mr. Gibbon, to account for the early spread of the Christian religion, namely, the miraculous powers ascribed to the primitive church, it is impossible not to notice the characteristic slyness with which the author has concealed a satire and a fallacy in the terms. What can Mr. Gibbon mean in the use of the word *ascribed*? If he means that these miraculous powers were falsely claimed and conceded, what becomes of his preliminary acknowledgment of the "evidence of the doctrine itself, and the ruling providence of its Author?" If, on the other

hand, he grants that these powers were really possessed, where is the fairness, nay, the common honesty, of employing a term which he knew would leave upon the mind of the majority of his readers a false and pernicious impression? But, apart from this, a fallacy lies in this part of Mr. Gibbon's reasoning, which it is still more important to expose. The kind of miraculous power, a claim to which is charged by Mr. Gibbon upon the primitive church, is such that any pretensions to it would rather have impeded than promoted the cause of Christianity. "They consisted," he says, "of divine inspirations, conveyed, sometimes in the form of a waking, sometimes a sleeping vision, and were liberally bestowed on all ranks of the faithful—on women as on elders, on boys as well as on bishops." The obvious reply to these representations may be given in the words of Bishop Watson :

"Cast your eye, Sir," says he, "upon the church of Rome, and ask yourself (I put the question to your heart, and beg you will consult that for an answer; ask yourself) whether her absurd pretensions to that very kind of miraculous powers you have here displayed as operating to the increase of Christianity, have not converted half her members to Protestantism, and the other half to infidelity? Neither the sword of the civil magistrate, nor the possession of the keys of heaven, nor the terrors of her spiritual thunder, have been able to keep within her pale even those who have been bred up in her faith; how, then, should you think, that the very cause which hath almost extinguished Christianity among Christians, should have established it among pagans? I beg I may not be misunderstood; I do not take upon me to say, that all the miracles recorded in the history of the primitive church after the apostolical age, were forgeries; it is foreign to the present purpose to deliver any opinion upon that subject: but I do beg leave to insist upon this, that such of them as were forgeries, must in that learned age, by their easy detection, have rather impeded than accelerated the progress of Christianity; and it appears very probable to me, that nothing but the recent prevailing evidence of real, unquestioned, apostolical miracles, could have secured the infant church from being destroyed by those which were falsely ascribed to it."

The next cause to which Mr. Gibbon ascribes the growth of the new religion, is "the pure and austere morals of the Christians." This would, at first sight, appear an unexceptionable position; as the purifying tendency of Christian truth, is not only one of its noblest distinctions, but one of its most legitimate and effectual recommendations. Such apparently fair admissions, however, as

this, should always have the effect of putting the reader of Mr. Gibbon's writings on his guard, against some particularly covert and formidable invasions of Christianity, which they generally introduce. Thus, in the close of the very paragraph in which the above statements occur, we find him accounting for this superior sanctity. "As it is my intention," says he, "to remark only on such human causes as were permitted to second the influence of revelation, I shall slightly mention two motives, which might naturally render the lives of the primitive Christians much purer and more austere than those of their pagan contemporaries, or their degenerate successors; repentance for their past sins, and the laudable desire of supporting the reputation of the society in which they were engaged." That even these motives should secure a higher degree of moral excellence, than was found among contemporary pagans, will be readily understood; though the principle on which this consideration accounts for the superiority of the primitive Christians over their "degenerate successors," seem somewhat obscure; since if they were *successors*, in other words true Christians, the same repentance, and care for the reputation of their fraternity, would be possessed alike by both. But further than this, to account for the purity of Christian morals by any such considerations, is at once to betray a strange want of acquaintance with human nature, and either the most contemptible ignorance or the most contemptuous disregard of those grand truths, to the reception of which alone the Christian ascribes whatever measure of holiness he may possess. Besides, the admission, erroneous as it is in Mr. Gibbon's application of it, has very obviously the further attribute of insincerity; and was probably designed to disarm the reader of his suspicion, and thus to prepare him for the heedless reception of the sentiments and sophisms of infidelity. Accordingly, in the course of the same chapter, we find him distributing the motives to virtue and general excellence, under two cardinal principles; the love of pleasure, and the love of action. "The character," says he, "in which both the one and the other should be united and harmonised, would seem to constitute the most perfect idea of human nature. The insensible and inactive disposition, which should be supposed alike destitute of both, would be rejected, by the common consent of mankind, as utterly incapable of procuring any happiness to the individual, or any public benefit to the world." "But," he immediately continues, "it was not in *this* world that the primitive Christians were desirous of making themselves either agreeable or useful." What construction can sophistry itself affix to this last sentence, except that the Christians were destitute of every motive

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to excellence, usefulness, or happiness? and how does this representation agree with his former one, that such was the excellency of their character, as to subdue the inveterate hostility of Jews and Romans, and to win them to the faith of the gospel? A similar insinuation occurs in the very next page. After descanting on the simplicity and undue self-denial of the early disciples of Jesus, he adds, "It is always easy, as well as agreeable, for the inferior ranks of mankind to claim a merit, from the contempt of that pomp and pleasure which fortune has placed beyond their reach. The virtue of the primitive Christians, *like that of the first Romans* () was very frequently guarded by poverty and ignorance." What are we to think of a writer, who alternately with such assassin-like attacks as these, has the mingled meanness and audacity (for milder terms would be inappropriate) to offer to the majesty of the Christian religion his courtly but insulting obeisance!

In noticing the fourth and last of Mr. Gibbon's reasons, it will only be necessary to point attention to the terms he adopts, from which the general tone of his disquisition upon it may be easily inferred. This he alleges to have been "The union and *discipline* of the Christian *Republic*, which gradually formed an *independent and increasing state* in the heart of the Roman Empire." Would any one suppose that this language referred to the primitive Christian church, and was adduced to account for the early prevalence of that spiritual kingdom which, as its founder declared, was "not of this world"! The attention of the reader is ingeniously diverted from apostles and converts to popes and cardinals, and he learns insensibly to class the best and purest times of Christianity among the ages of its foulest corruptions. The object of the historian in this, the closing part of his argument, is consistent with that which he has at once conceded and promoted, throughout the portion of his history under review. It is to unspiritualize religion; to confound that extraordinary association which is based on a community of belief, experience, affections, and hopes, with those which are merely civil and political; to keep out of sight the special relation which the Divine Being sustains to the former; and to represent it as a system ingeniously devised, for obtaining a vast but imperceptible influence over mankind, by imposing on their credulity those notions which, while they would not bear the scrutiny of the philosopher, had a salutary effect on the morals of the great mass of society. Hence the use of such terms, as the "*Christian Republic*," "*a large and increasing state*," with a variety of others, calculated to insinuate into the mind the most vital errors, with that imperceptible gentleness which should neither disturb its prejudices, nor awaken its fears.

It need not excite surprise, still less need it intrude any doubts respecting the evidence of revealed religion, that so covert a mode of attack should in many instances have met with success; and even where this has not been the result, the dangers through which the reader has securely passed, have remained undetected. A striking instance of this is afforded by a late distinguished philosopher, Sir James Mackintosh. In allusion to the five causes to which, as we have seen, Mr. Gibbon ascribes the triumphs of Christianity, Sir James writes: "Perhaps those which he enumerates, are among the most obvious. They might all be safely adopted by a Christian writer, with some change in the language and manner." That this extraordinary man should not have perceived a hostility to religion, in these chapters, far more mischievous than any that can belong to mere manner, is doubtless to be attributed, not to any defect of acuteness, still less to a leaning to sceptical opinions, but solely to that generous candour, which is the invariable distinction of a philosophic mind, but which, when unchastened with experience and caution, is too apt to concede sincerity to all who are ingenious enough to conceal their duplicity.

The latter part of Bishop Watson's reply to Gibbon, is occupied in animadversions upon the closing portion of his fifteenth chapter; in which he manifestly impugns the authenticity of the New Testament histories: though still with that degree of adroitness, and simulation of respect, which he ever maintained; and which, while it rendered his work more dangerous, gave to it a character of unutterable meanness. Having delicately insinuated doubts and reflections upon the statements of divine revelation, throughout those chapters of his history which he devotes to its consideration, he attempts, in the last paragraph of the fifteenth, to leave a permanent impression on the mind of the reader, against that invaluable kind of evidence for the truth of Christianity, derived from miracles. The tone of reproach which he affects, in noticing the unbelief of the ancient heathen, is peculiarly characteristic; and the whole paragraph, by its mingled malignity, cowardice, and duplicity, stigmatizes its author in the ranks of infidelity, as "the least exalted spirit that fell,"

"*But how shall we excuse,*" says he, "the supine inattention of the pagan and philosophic world, to those evidences which were presented by the hand of Omnipotence, not to their reason, but to their senses? During the age of Christ, of his apostles, and of their first disciples, the doctrine which they preached was confirmed by innumerable prodigies. The lame walked, the blind saw, the sick were healed, the dead were raised, demons were expelled, and

the laws of nature were frequently suspended for the benefit of the church. But the sages of Greece and Rome turned aside from the awful spectacle, and pursuing the ordinary occupations of life and study, appeared unconscious of any alterations in the moral or physical government of the world. Under the reign of Tiberius, the whole earth, or at least a celebrated province of the Roman empire, was involved in a preternatural darkness of three hours. Even this miraculous event, which ought to have excited the wonder, the curiosity, and the devotion of mankind, passed without notice in an age of science and history. It happened during the lifetime of Seneca and the elder Pliny, who must have experienced the immediate effects, or received the earliest intelligence of the prodigy. Each of these philosophers, in a laborious work, has recorded all the great phenomena of nature, earthquakes, meteors, comets, and eclipses, which his indefatigable curiosity could collect. Both the one and the other have omitted to mention the greatest phenomenon to which the mortal eye has been witness since the creation of the globe. A distinct chapter of Pliny is designed for eclipses of an extraordinary nature and unusual duration: but he contents himself with describing the singular defect of light which followed the murder of Cæsar, when, during the greatest part of the year, the orb of the sun appeared pale and without splendour. This season of obscurity, which cannot surely be compared with the preternatural darkness of the Passion, had been already celebrated by most of the poets and historians of that memorable age."

Respecting the first allegation of the historian, viz., that the Christian miracles were unnoticed by learned and observant heathens, Dr. Watson remarks, first, the comparative infrequency of these miracles, and the consequent probability that no contemporary historian ever witnessed them, for otherwise they would undoubtedly have noticed them, since they do not hesitate to record the silly juggles of Vespasian; *secondly*, that so far from being inattentive to those wonders, by which the Divine Being attested the inspiration of his early servants, multitudes of pagans saw and believed, and forsaking all hopes of worldly honour, riches, or security, devoted themselves to the profession of Christianity; and *lastly*, that the miracles of the Christians were attributed by many to magic, and were, therefore, deemed unworthy of notice by contemporary annalists. With regard to the preternatural darkness at the crucifixion, the Dr. shows that it was probably partial, and therefore the less obvious to universal notice, by these considerations. First, from the fact of Jesus having seen from the cross his mother and John, though there is reason to believe that

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they were at some short distance; *secondly*, because the same word used by the same historian, is elsewhere employed to denote a darkness which must necessarily have been very slight; and *thirdly*, because the term translated "all the earth," may with great propriety be translated "*all the region*," by which version the silence of contemporary but foreign historians is easily explained.

Such are the principal features of the controversy, as carried on by the Bishop of Llandaff against the Roman historian. As far as regards its influence upon the public mind, Dr. Watson's Apology, by dwelling chiefly upon the cardinal topics involved in Mr. Gibbon's five reasons for the spread of Christianity, has been by far the most successful of the replies. Those of Mr. Davies, and of Sir David Dalrymple, were devoted to a closer examination of those inaccuracies, and ingenious and almost imperceptible fallacies which render the historian's treatise so dangerous, by gradually impressing sentiments which in the commencement he had the hypocrisy to disavow, and which, to the last, he never had the courage to defend. But notwithstanding their evil design and pernicious tendency, the effect of Mr. Gibbon's writings was exceedingly circumscribed. Their learning and their magnitude alike limited their influence, while the more concise and popular replies of his opponents still further promoted this result.

Neither of these circumstances affected the individual who next claims our notice. THOMAS PAINE was eminently qualified to influence the minds of the vulgar. His style of writing was perspicuous and pointed, abounding with wit, and rendered still more influential by the circumstances into which he was introduced by the American war and the French Revolution. His aversion to the Christian religion was undisguised and unbounded; and perhaps there are few men who have met with such melancholy success in their attempts to seduce mankind from the enjoyments and prospects of religion, to the chill and dreary shades of infidelity. This effect was greatly enhanced by his political writings, which lent to his name a degree of splendour highly favourable to the reception of his religious tenets. In these there was scarcely any thing that was new; most of his objections to Christianity had been triumphantly refuted many times before; and if all had not shared the same fate, it was because, in his incredible ignorance of the Christian religion and Scriptures, he had fallen into some errors, of which his more cautious predecessors had never dreamed.

When it is remembered, that in his principal work, entitled "The Age of Reason," Mr. Paine attempts to invalidate the genuineness and authenticity of the entire Scripture histories, prophecies, gospels,

and epistles ; and to pick out innumerable inconsistencies, without the remotest pretensions either to scholarship, theological knowledge, or common sincerity, it will readily be supposed that this is not the place in which his innumerable representations can be exposed. They have already been most ably refuted by a number of eminent divines ; among whom we may mention, as the principal, Bishop Watson, in his *Apology for the Bible*, Thomas Scott, in his *Vindication of the Divine Inspiration of the Holy Scriptures*, and Andrew Fuller, in his "*Gospel its own Witness*." Of all his objections against revealed religion, there is but one that has the slightest pretensions to originality ; and as this one argument has been completely answered by Mr. Fuller, and subsequently, by a similar process of reasoning, but with greater prolixity, and gorgeousness of illustration, by Dr. Chalmers, it will suffice to confine our notice of Mr. Paine's writings to a brief detail of this branch of the controversy.

His argument is founded upon the recent discoveries of Astronomy, which render probable the existence of a plurality of worlds. It may be stated in the following manner. It is highly probable that this world is but an insignificant point in the creation, surrounded on all sides by myriads of globes, inhabited by intelligent beings ; but if so, how incredible is it that it should have engrossed so vast a portion of the Divine regard ; that in this little inhabited speck God himself should become incarnate, and thus accomplish results so mighty as to be without a parallel in the history of his eternal administration so far as it is known to us. Of this apparent disproportion he makes the most, in his opposition to the Christian revelation. "Though it is not," he says, "a direct article of the Christian system, that this world which we inhabit is the whole of the habitable creation, yet it is so worked up therewith, from what is called the Mosaic account of the creation, the story of Eve and the apple, and the counterpart of that story, the death of the Son of God, that to believe otherwise, that is, to believe that God created a plurality of worlds, at least as numerous as what we call stars, renders the Christian system of faith at once little and ridiculous, and scatters it in the mind like feathers in the air. The two beliefs cannot be held together in the same mind ; and he who thinks he believes both, has thought but little of either." With these views he attempts to show, that the Scriptures recognise this as the only world ; and to exhibit the absurdity of supposing, either that in this world only this manifestation of Divine condescension was made, or that every other world had been similarly visited. Against these statements Mr. Fuller offers the following arguments.

1. That so far from "the two beliefs" being inconsistent with each other, they have been held together by some of the greatest of men.

2. That so far from "the Christian system of faith forming itself upon the idea of only one world," it distinctly reveals in addition a world of happiness, and a world of misery; and nowhere implies that these three states comprehend the whole inhabited creation.

3. That if the notion of a plurality of worlds interfere in any degree with the doctrines of revelation, it should obviously be abandoned, since at best it is matter, not of belief, but merely of opinion and conjecture, while the system of opinion with which it is alleged to interfere, comes supported by an irrefragable body of evidence.

The author next proposed to show, that admitting the intelligent creation to be as extensive as modern philosophy supposes, the credibility of redemption is not thereby weakened, but on the contrary in many respects is strengthened and aggrandized. After premising the incalculable importance with which the condition of immortality invests the nature of man, and the consequent fitness of a vast expenditure of means to secure his happiness, he argues the consistency of the Scripture doctrine of redemption, with the supposed magnitude of creation, from the following considerations.

1. Whatever be its extent, we have no proof that it contains any beings who have apostatized from God, except men and angels.

2. Whatever be its extent, there is no inconsistency in supposing that a particular part of it may be chosen from the rest, as a theatre on which the great Author of all things would perform his most glorious works.

3. For such a display, that spot would probably be chosen wherein the greatest efforts had been made to dishonour God.

4. The events which have thus transpired, in this little insignificant world, are competent to fill God's whole dominions with great and everlasting joy.

He further argues, that the credibility of the Gospel scheme is enhanced by the supposed magnitude of the creation, on the following grounds.

1. The Scripture teaches us first, that God's regard to man is an astonishing manifestation of his condescension, and that *on account* of the disparity between him and the celestial creation.

2. That before creation, this world was marked out by eternal wisdom, as the theatre of this great manifestation.

3. That the mediation of Christ is represented as bearing a reference to the whole creation, by bringing them into union with the church of God.

4. That thus, through the mediation of Christ, not only is the whole creation represented as augmenting the blessedness of the church, but the church as augmenting the blessedness of the whole creation.

5. The Scriptures teach us, that the earth itself, with all its redeemed inhabitants, shall, at a future period, be purified, and reunited to the holy empire of God: and

Lastly. That even the punishment of the finally impenitent, is represented as appointed for an impressive example to the whole creation.

By this admirable train of reasoning Mr. Fuller meets one of the most recent of the aggressions of philosophy and rationalism against the truths of revelation: and so long as that reasoning shall remain on record, it is not presumptuous to predict that the ingenious speculation of Paine will be consigned, together with the dishonest sophistry of Hume, and the respectful treachery of Gibbon, to unbroken and lasting forgetfulness.

On the whole, we cannot dismiss the deistical writings of Paine, with any more respect than is claimed by the modern infidels whose works have previously come under review. In point of learning, reputation, and influence, he stood far below the great historians; while his ignorance of his principal subject, theology, and of the Bible in particular, was the most gross and contemptible that it is possible to imagine. His virulence and bitterness of spirit against every thing related to religion, clearly showed that his opposition was not that of philosophy, but of prejudice; while the cowardice of his nature, and the impurity of his morals, to which the absolute filthiness of his person was a tolerably faithful index, proved that his infidelity grew out of his fears, and that, like the miserable Rochester, he knew, in fact, no objection to the Bible, but a bad life. Degraded, however, as he was in a social point of view, below the ordinary level of human nature, he was a man of great acuteness, of much original wit, and one of the most masterly political writers of his day; all which gave to his theological works a vogue and influence, which, from their intrinsic worthlessness, they could not otherwise have obtained. Accordingly, they were productive for a time of an accession to the ranks of infidelity, both in France and in this country, augmenting at once the numbers, the confidence, and the virulence of the deistical school. The replies, however, to which reference has already been made, together with the many and invaluable works on the evidences of Christianity, to which the writings of Paine indirectly gave rise, have established the authenticity

of revelation on new and impregnable grounds; and have proved by their result, that detected sophisms are quite as incapable of revival as exploded superstitions.

Subsequently to the publication of the "Age of Reason," the deistical controversy has been carried on in this country, by the offensive party, with such a total destitution of originality, argumentative power, and ingenuity, as scarcely to repay the tedious task of perusing it. Philosophical freedom of thought has long ceased to be the distinction of the sceptic; and nothing but levity, insolence, obscenity, and a daring contempt of every sacred and social obligation, remain to distinguish him from the believer in the Gospel. To draw from their obscurity those writers whose opposition to Christianity is confined to offensive sneers and indecent ribaldry, to which it is alike impossible and improper to reply, would be gratuitously to circulate the poison without the antidote. As little is it necessary to extend the notoriety which has been obtained by some modern deists, solely by the refutations which their productions have received at the hands of the learned and the good—to publish the infamy of a Carlile because Mr. Carson* condescended to rebuke him, or the blasphemy of a Taylor because the enormity and pestilence of his wickedness enlisted against him the learning and piety of Dr. Smith.† It only remains to notice two modern infidel schools, whose opposition to religion is analogous to that which has been already noticed, and which was founded on modern astronomical discovery. Like that exploded argument, those of the schools in question, unable to stand alone, claim support from the partial and short-sighted deductions of philosophy, "falsely so called." The one founds its hostility to revealed religion, on the recent discoveries of Geology; and the other, with Robert Owen at its head, connects that hostility with the wildest dogmas and most empirical nostrums of political economy.

The investigations of geologists have led to the discovery of certain organic remains, both animal and vegetable, to which they are compelled to assign a date long prior to any embraced in the Mosaic chronology. These phenomena have been seized upon, as invalidating the authenticity of the Mosaic record; and while infi-

* The Truth of the Gospel demonstrated from the character of God manifested in the Atonement. A Letter to Mr. Richard Carlile, by Alexander Carson.—Edinburgh, 1820.

† An Answer to a Paper, entitled "Manifesto of the Christian Evidence Society," by John Pye Smith, D. D. The above manifesto may be regarded, as marking the ultimate boundary to which the gross ignorance and incompetency of modern deists has attained; and as constituting the last effort of that party, of sufficient importance to deserve a mention in these pages.

dels, on the one hand, have rejoiced in an unexpected triumph over the pretensions of revelation generally, not a few Christian writers, with more zeal than judgment, have preferred a most unfounded charge of deism against the science and the students of geology. Amongst the earliest defenders of the Christian religion, from this new species of invasion, was Dr. Chalmers. Subsequently, however, the argument has been so luminously stated by Dr. Buckland in his *Bridgewater Treatise on Geology*, that he may with propriety be regarded as setting the question at rest. His argument may be thus stated. First, That it is as unreasonable to expect a history of geological phenomena in the Mosaic history, as to look for a specific mention of the satellites of Jupiter, or the rings of Saturn. That the object of the historian was simply to reveal the history of the human race, and only records the origin of the earth itself, and the heavenly bodies, in order to teach that they were not eternal and self-existent, but the offspring of divine wisdom and power : and Secondly, That the first verse of Genesis, which is the principal object of attack, may be fairly appealed to by the Christian geologist, as expressing, by the word *beginning*, an undefined period of time—as containing a brief statement of the creation of the material elements, at a time distinctly preceding the operations of the first day. That it is not affirmed, that God created the heavens and the earth in the first day, but *in the beginning* ; and that this *beginning* may have been an epoch at an unmeasured distance, followed by periods of undefined duration, during which the physical operations disclosed by geology were going on.

The system of opinion which bears the name of Mr. Owen is far more comprehensive. It is levelled alike against the fundamental principles of morals, every pretension of the Scriptures, and every principle and feeling of a religious nature, that ever has been entertained by the human race, in any age or country. With what may be called the ethical part of Mr. Owen's creed we have nothing to do. It may be briefly stated in his own words. "It does not belong," says he, "to the constitution of man, or the original nature of his constitution, that there can be merit or demerit in the opinions or feelings of a single human being." So much for morals.

With respect to religion, he advocates, somewhat whimsically, the existence of a First Cause ; whom, in innocent acquiescence with the prejudices of "the old world," he agrees to call "God ;" but denies that man has ever had the means of acquainting himself, in the slightest degree, with his attributes, character, or conduct ; as if we were any more able to ascertain the existence of God, irrespectively of his attributes, than we are to demonstrate the existence

of matter irrespectively of the only properties of it which meet our senses,—extension, impenetrability, and the rest !

But we have said that his religious opinions rest upon a certain system of political economy. This connexion may be thus explained. He advocates the perfection of human nature; and attributes the misery and wickedness which prevail in the world, to the law makers, and not the law breakers. In concurrence with this opinion, he pleads for the community of property, the dissolution of the present regime of marriage, and the universal license of the innocent propensities of human nature. Hence he discards the Christian religion, as a system of superstition and priestcraft, calculated to repress the indulgence of the natural appetites, and to limit the happiness of mankind. "The basis," he says, "of the religion of truth, is the knowledge that the laws of nature have given the power to *adult* man, so to control the mental faculties, and physical powers of his *infant*, as to force it to receive error, however absurd or inconsistent, or to imbibe truth, only known to be truth by its undeviating consistency with the ascertained laws of nature." He thus presupposes, as existing in the mind of man, a perfect knowledge of all the laws which control the physical and the intellectual world; and by a just deduction, repudiates revelation, as an impertinent interference with this inscrutable wisdom. The relation then betwixt his views of religion and political economy is obvious. Assuming that nothing is necessary to the perfection of human nature, but a rational and educational social system, he deems religion unnecessary and perplexing; and contends that praise and blame have ever hitherto been perversely awarded; and that the obedience to the ascertained laws of nature, or, in other words, to the dictates of inclination, will expel selfishness, sin, and religion, with all their dependent miseries, from the world, and leave mankind a race of immaculate ephemera ! To reply to such mere assumptions, it might suffice us to point Mr. Owen to that vast body of evidence, by which the authenticity of revelation, as a whole, and the truth of its doctrines respectively, are proved by every species of argument, historical, abstract, and experimental, and of which Mr. Owen indicates, in every sentence, the densest ignorance. But, on an attentive perusal of his writings, we feel even this to be unnecessary. Apart from the habitual assumption of every principle which has been refuted in every age of the world, and by the universal experience of mankind—apart from his assuming, as a perfectly easy task, to expel from the human mind, by a process of education, selfishness, envy, malice, and all uncharitableness, we find such a hopeless haziness of intellect, as threatens

almost to paralyze the energy, and exclude the light, of divine truth itself. Hence he exhibits an insensibility to evidence, and a reckless audacity of assertion, which is perfectly astounding. He states, for example, that all the religions of the world are founded on the same suppositions, and that they are the following.

1. That there is an absolute necessity to believe all that the priests declare.

2. That the blackest of crimes is to disbelieve what they promulgate as divine truths.

3. That there is the same criminality in loving or hating, what the priests all over the world say should be loved or hated.

4. That for believing and loving what the priests say should be disbelieved or hated, men shall be eternally rewarded or punished.

"You thus perceive," he continues, "that when religion is stripped of the mysteries with which the priests of all times and countries have invested it, all its divinity vanishes; and it stands before the astonished world, in all its naked deformity of vice, hypocrisy, and imbecility. In consequence of this discovery, all testimony handed down to us from our remote and ignorant ancestors, when opposed to facts, or the unchanging laws of nature, will not hereafter be received into any intelligent or superior mind. Such will be aware, that, of necessity, *the universe must be one great truth, (!)* composed of all the facts which it contains," &c. &c. To reply to such rabid stuff as this, would be to waste the time of the writer, and the patience of the reader.

It does not fall within the scope of this introduction, to notice the progress of Deism in other nations. It might be sufficient to rejoice, that the mantle of the ancient Freethinkers is now only employed, to veil from the public view the demoralizing and disgusting filthiness of their successors. The opinions of Mr. Owen, however, will lead the recollection of the reader to the School of Rationalists, who usurp the name of Christians in Germany. These, like the raving Apostle of the "New Moral World," appoint human philosophy as the supreme arbiter of religious truth; and while they ridicule the inspiration of the Bible, regarding prophets as patriotic bards, and Jesus and his apostles as promulgating important truths by justifiable frauds, yet allow the system to continue, as "a muzzle for the brute," until the transforming efficacy of philosophical morality shall have rendered its influence unnecessary.

We have already seen, in the course of this brief review, the fallacies and iniquities of successive schools of infidelity, falling

before the power of the truth of the Gospel. It is gratifying to know, that this ostentatious usurpation of the dignities of religion, is fast falling into contempt. We have already followed many of the devices of a corrupt ingenuity to the long home of forgetfulness; and we delight to fortify, by experience, the confident hope, that in every succeeding attempt to overcloud the lustre of the gospel, the thin and empty mists of human folly will roll away beneath a distant horizon, before the ever brightening beams of the Sun of Righteousness.

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A VIEW
OF THE
DEISTICAL WRITERS, &c.

IN SEVERAL LETTERS TO A FRIEND.

LETTER I.

Some Account of those that first took upon them the Name of Deists.—Lord Herbert of Cherbury, one of the most eminent deistical Writers that appeared in England in the last Age.—His attempt to form Deism into a System.—Observations upon his Scheme, and upon the five Principles in which he makes all Religion to consist.—It is shown that the Knowledge of them was very imperfect and defective in the heathen World ; and that a Revelation from God for clearing and confirming those important Principles might be of great advantage.

DEAR SIR,

I NOW enter upon the task you have enjoined me, the giving some account of the principal deistical writers that have appeared among us for above a century past. The reasons given by you and other judicious friends, have convinced me that such a work might be of use, if properly executed ; we only differed as to the fitness of the person that was to execute it. My objections have been overruled ; I must therefore set about it as well as I can : and if I were sure that others would look upon this attempt with the same favourable eye that your candour and friendship for me will incline you to do, I should be in no great pain about the success of it.

The name of Deists, as applied to those who are no friends to revealed religion, is said to have been first assumed about the middle of the sixteenth century, by some gentlemen in France and Italy, who were willing to cover their opposition to the Christian revelation by a more honourable name than that of atheists. One of the first authors, as far as I can find, that makes express mention of them, is Viret, a divine of great eminence among the first reformers, who in the epistle dedicatory prefixed to the second tome of his *Instruction Chretienne*, which was published in 1563, speaks of some persons in that time who called themselves by a new name, that of deists. These, he tells us, professed to believe a God, but

showed no regard to Jesus Christ, and considered the doctrine of the apostles and evangelists as fables and dreams. He adds, that they laughed at all religion, notwithstanding they conformed themselves, with regard to the outward appearance, to the religion of those with whom they were obliged to live, or whom they were desirous of pleasing, or whom they feared. Some of them, as he observes, professed to believe the immortality of the soul; others were of the *Epicurean* opinion in this point, as well as about the providence of God with respect to mankind, as if he did not concern himself in the government of human affairs. He adds, that many among them set up for learning and philosophy, and were looked upon to be persons of an acute and subtle genius; and that, not content to perish alone in their error, they took pains to spread the poison, and to infect and corrupt others, by their impious discourses and bad examples.*

I leave it to you to judge, how far the account this learned author gives of the persons that in his time called themselves deists, is applicable to those among us who take upon them the same title, and which they seem to prefer to that of Christians, by which the disciples of Jesus have hitherto thought it their glory to be distinguished. That which properly characterizes these deists is, that they reject all revealed religion, and discard all pretences to it, as owing to imposture or enthusiasm. In this they all agree, and in professing a regard for natural religion, though they are far from being agreed in their notions of it. They are classed by some of their own writers into two sorts, mortal and immortal deists.† The latter acknowledge a future state: the former deny it, or at least represent it as a very uncertain thing: and though these are, by some among themselves, represented under a very disadvantageous character, and as little better than atheists, they are, it is to be feared, the more numerous of the two. Indeed some of their most eminent modern writers seem to be very easy about these differences. With them all are true deists who oppose revelation, whether they own future rewards and punishments or not; and they speak with great regard of those disinterested deists who profess to pursue virtue for its own sake, without regard to future retributions.‡

In giving an account of the deistical writers that have appeared in these nations (for I shall not meddle with those of a foreign growth), I shall go back to the former part of the last century; and the first I shall mention, and who deserves a particular notice, is that learned nobleman, Lord Edward Herbert, Baron of Cherbury. He may be justly regarded as the most eminent of the deistical writers, and in several respects superior to those that succeeded him. He may be also considered as the first remarkable deist in order of time, that appeared among us as a writer in the last century; for the first edition of his book *de Veritate* was in 1624, when it was first

* Bayle's Dictionary, article Viret.

† Oracles of Reason, p. 99.

‡ Christianity as old as the Creation, p. 332, 333. ed. 8vo.

published at Paris. It was afterwards published at London, as was also his book *de Causis Errorum*, to which is subjoined his treatise *de Religione Laici*. Some years after this, and when the author was dead, his celebrated work *de Religione Gentilium* was published at Amsterdam, in 1663, in quarto; and it was afterwards re-printed there in 1700, in octavo, which is the edition I make use of; and an English translation of it was published at London in 1705.

His Lordship seems to have been one of the first that formed Deism into a system, and asserted the sufficiency, universality, and absolute perfection, of natural religion, with a view to discard all extraordinary revelation as useless and needless. He seems to assume to himself the glory of having accomplished it with great labour, and a diligent inspection into all religions, and applauds himself for it, as happier than any Archimedes.* This universal religion he reduceth to five articles, which he frequently mentioneth in all his works. 1. That there is one supreme God. 2. That he is chiefly to be worshipped. 3. That piety and virtue are the principal part of his worship. 4. That we must repent of our sins; and if we do so, God will pardon them. 5. That there are rewards for good men, and punishments for bad men, in a future state; or, as he sometimes expresseth it, both here and hereafter. These he represents as common notices inscribed by God on the minds of all men, and undertakes to show that they were universally acknowledged in all nations, ages, and religions. This is particularly the design of his book *de Religione Gentilium*; though it is but comparatively a small part of that work which tendeth directly to prove that these articles universally obtained: the far greater part of it is taken up with an account of the heathen religion and ceremonies, which he hath performed with an abundance of learning, and hath intermixed many softening apologies for the pagan superstition and idolatry.

As he represents these five articles as absolutely necessary, the five pillars, as he calls them, on which all religion is built; so he endeavours to show that they alone are sufficient, and that nothing can be added to them which can tend to render any man more virtuous, or a better man. But then he subjoins this limitation, "provided these articles be well explained in their full latitude."† This universal religion which all men agree in, his Lordship represents to be the only religion of which there can be any certainty, and he endeavours to show the great advantages that would arise from men's embracing this religion, and this only. One of the reasons he offers to recommend it is this, that this catholic or universal religion answers the ultimate design of the holy Scriptures. "*Sacrarum literarum fini ultimo intentionique quadrat.*" He adds, that "all the doctrines there taught aim at the establishment of these five catholic articles, as we have often hinted; there is no sacrament, rite, or ceremony there enjoined, but what aims, or seems

* De Relig. Gentil. c. 15. init. † Appendix to Relig. Laici, qu. 3d.

to aim, at the establishment of these five articles." See his reasons at the end of his *Religio Laici*.

One would be apt to think by what this noble writer here offers, that he must have a very favourable opinion of Christianity as contained in the holy Scriptures; since he represents it as the great design of all its doctrines, and even of the rites and sacraments there enjoined, to establish those great principles in which he makes religion properly to consist. Accordingly he expressly declares in the above-mentioned treatise, that it was far from his intention to do harm to *the best religion*, as he there calls Christianity, or the true faith, but rather to establish both.*

But I am sorry that I am obliged to say, that, notwithstanding these fair professions, his Lordship on all occasions insinuateth prejudices against all revealed religion, as absolutely uncertain, and of little or no use. He inveigheth promiscuously, as many others have done since, against all pretences to revelation, without making a distinction between the false and the true. He often speaks to the disadvantage of *particular* religion, which is a name he bestoweth on the Christian religion, and any revelation that is not actually known and promulgated to the whole world: and he representeth it as containing doctrines, which disgust some men against all religion, and therefore is for recommending what he calls the universal religion, as the best way to prevent men's having no religion at all. And particularly he insinuates, that the Christian religion granteth pardon on too easy terms, and derogateth from the obligations to virtue;† a reflection which is manifestly owing to a misapprehension or misrepresentation of the doctrine of Christianity on this head. So he elsewhere supposeth, that the faith there required is no more than a bare assent to the doctrines there taught; though nothing is capable of a clearer proof, than that the faith on which so great a stress is laid in the gospel covenant is to be understood of a vital operative principle, which purifieth the heart, and is productive of good works; and that the necessity of true holiness and virtue is there strongly inculcated. The charge he advanceth against Christianity might be more justly retorted upon himself, who, though he mentions it to the praise of his universal religion, that it giveth no license to sin, but bindeth men strictly to the severity of virtue, yet to show what reason sinners have to hope for pardon, offereth several pleas and excuses that tend to extenuate the guilt of sin. Particularly he urgeth, that men's sins are not for the most part committed out of enmity against God, or to cast dishonour upon him, but with a view to their own particular advantage or pleasure, and are chosen by them under the appearance of some good.‡ And in his book *de Veritate* he declares, that those are not lightly to be condemned, who are carried to sin by their particular bodily constitution; and he instances particularly in the rage of lust and

* *Relig. Laici*, p. 28.

† The Appendix to his *Relig. Laici*, qu. 6.

‡ *De Relig. Gentil.* p. 268. Dr. Tindal talks in the same strain. Christianity as old as the Creation, p. 32. ed. 8vo.

anger; no more than a dropsical person is to be blamed for his immoderate thirst, or a lethargic person for his laziness and inactivity. He adds, indeed, that he does not set up as an apologist for wicked men, but yet that we ought to pass a mild censure upon those who are carried to sin by a corporeal and almost necessary propensity to vice. *Neque tamen me hic conscelerati cujusvis patrum sisto; sed in id solummodo contendo, ut mitiori sententia de iis statuamus, qui corporea, brutali, et tantum non necessaria propensione in peccata prolabuntur.* This apology may be carried very far, so as to open a wide door to licentiousness, and would soon introduce a very loose morality.

But not to insist upon this, I would observe that the principal design of his treatise *de Religione Laici* seems to be to show, that the people can never attain to any satisfaction as to the truth and certainty of any particular revelation, and therefore must rest in the five articles agreed to by all religions. This particularly is the intention of his fourth and fifth queries in the appendix to that treatise. In his fourth query he supposes, that the things which are added to those common principles from the doctrines of faith are uncertain in their original; and that though God is true, the Laics can never be certain that what is pretended to be a revelation from God is indeed a true revelation from God. In his fifth query he urgeth, that supposing the originals to be true, yet they are uncertain in their explications. To this purpose he takes notice of the multiplicity of sects among Christians; and that the Laics can never be sufficiently sure of the meaning of the revelation, concerning which there are so many controversies; that in order to arrive at any certainty in these matters, it would be necessary either to *learn all languages, to read all the celebrated writers, and to consult all those learned men that have not written*, a method which is manifestly absurd and impracticable; or else to have recourse to a *supreme judge of controversies* appointed by common consent.

It is an observation that will undoubtedly occur to you on this occasion, that his Lordship here maketh use precisely of the same way of talking, to show that the Laics can have no certainty about any revelation at all, which the writers of the Romish Church have frequently urged to show the necessity the people are under to rely entirely upon the authority of the Church or Pope, because of the difficulties or the impossibility of their coming to any certainty in the way of examination or private judgment. But if the Laity cannot be certain of revealed religion, because of the controversies that have been raised about the articles of it, for the same reason it may be said, that they can arrive at no certainty with respect to his Lordship's catholic universal religion: for though he representeth men as universally agreed in the five articles in which he makes that religion to consist, it is undeniable that there have been great controversies about them; and that the modern deists, as well as ancient philosophers, are divided in their sentiments in relation to them, especially when explained, as he requireth they should

be, in their full latitude. He ought not therefore to make a thing's being controverted to be a proof of its uncertainty, and that men can come to no satisfaction about it; a principle which he and other deists often insist upon, but which manifestly leads to universal scepticism. But this is not the only instance, in which arguments have been brought against Christianity, that in their consequences tend to subvert all religion, and all evidence and certainty of reason.

From this general view of Lord Herbert's scheme, it sufficiently appears that his design was to overturn all revealed, or, as he calls it, particular religion, and to establish that natural and universal religion, the clearness and perfection of which he so much extols, in its room, as that which alone ought to be acknowledged and embraced as true and divine.

I shall now freely lay before you some observations that have occurred to me in considering the scheme of this noble author.

One is this, that he hath carried his account of natural religion much farther than some others of the deists have done. It were to be wished, that all that glory in this character would agree with this noble Lord in a hearty reception of those articles which he representeth as so essentially necessary, and of such vast importance. These he would have to be explained in their full extent, and that except they be properly explained they are not sufficient. Thus explained, they include the belief not only of the existence, but the attributes of God; of some of which, in his book *de Veritate*, he gives a good account, and of his providence and moral government. He asserts, that God is to be worshipped, and that this worship includeth our offering up to him our prayers and thanksgivings;* that piety and virtue are absolutely necessary to our acceptance with God; and he particularly urgeth the necessity of observing the ten commandments; that we are obliged to repent of our sins in order to our obtaining forgiveness, and that this repentance includeth both a sorrow for our sins, and a turning from them to the right way. He also insisteth upon the belief of the immortality of the soul, and a future state of rewards and punishments, in which God will recompense men *according to their actions*, and even *according to their thoughts*.† These things he supposeth to be common notices, so clear that he can scarce be accounted a reasonable creature who denieth them. And yet I am afraid, if all these things are to be looked upon as necessary, many that call themselves deists will be as loath to admit his Lordship's natural and catholic religion, as Christianity itself. There is reason to apprehend, that some of their strongest prejudices against Christianity arise from its setting those principles in too clear a light, and enforcing them in too strong a manner. It is true, that when they are for putting a fair gloss upon deism, and asserting the sufficiency and perfection of natural religion abstracted from all revelation, they are willing to have it

* *De Veritate*, p. 271, 272.

† *De Relig. Gentil.* p. 283.

thought that their religion includeth the belief of those important articles. They are then obliged to have recourse to his Lordship's system, and the arms he hath furnished them with ; but at other times they make it plainly appear that they are far from being fixed in these principles. His Lordship declares, that it is necessary these articles should be well explained : but indeed they are expressed in very general and indefinite terms, and there is no great likelihood of their agreeing in the explications of them. It is a thing well known, that many who have made no small figure among our modern deists have denied some of his Lordship's five articles, at least taken in the extent in which he seems willing to understand them. God's moral government and particular providence ; his worship, especially as it includes prayer and praise ; man's free agency, the immortality of the soul, and a future state of retributions, have made no part of their creed. Some of them have been far from pleading for that strictness of virtue which his Lordship tells us natural religion obliges men to ; and, instead of urging the necessity of repentance, have, after Spinoza, represented it as a mean, an unreasonable, and wretched thing.* And the rewards and punishments of a future state have been exploded under the notion of bribes and terrors, a regard to which argueth a sordid and mercenary temper of soul, inconsistent with a true and generous virtue.

Another reflection that it is proper to make on Lord Herbert's scheme is this : that these five principles, in which he makes his universal religion to consist, were not so very clear and well known to all mankind, as to make an external revelation needless or useless. His Lordship indeed supposeth them to be common notices, inscribed by a divine hand in the minds of men ; and accordingly he sets himself to prove, with a great show of learning, in his book *de Religione Gentilium*, that these principles were universally believed and acknowledged by the people in all ages, countries, and religions. But any man that carefully examines his book will find, that all that he really proves is no more than this ; that there were some imperfect vestiges of these important truths preserved among the Gentiles, and that the knowledge of them was never absolutely and totally extinguished, which will be easily allowed. But he has not proved, that the people, or even all those that passed for wise and learned, had a distinct knowledge and assurance of those principles, especially if taken in their just extent. The testimonies he hath produced, by no means prove such an universal agreement : what he seemeth principally to rely upon is the reasonableness and evidence of the principles themselves, which he supposeth to be so plain, that no rational man can be ignorant of them. Thus he declares, that he would sooner doubt whether the beams of the sun shone upon those regions, than suppose that the knowledge of God, the evidences of whose existence and perfections are so obvious from

* *Pœnitentia virtus non est, sive ex ratione non oritur : quem facti pœnitet bis libet seu impotens est.* Spin. Eth. Pt. 4. Prop. 54.

his works, did not enlighten their minds.* And he cannot be persuaded, that any of them worshipped the sun as the chief deity, because of the incredible absurdity of such a practice, which he well exposes.† But when we are inquiring what men do in fact believe and practise, we are not to judge of it from what we apprehend it is reasonable for them to believe and practise.

If this were a proper place to take a distinct view of the proofs he hath offered in relation to his famous five articles, it would be no hard matter to show, that, according to his own representation of the case, they were not so universally acknowledged and clearly known among the Gentiles, as to make a farther revelation and enforcement of them to be of no use or advantage. This might be particularly shown with regard to the first and second of these articles, viz., That there is one supreme God, and that this God is to be worshipped; which are principles of the greatest importance, and which lie at the foundation of all the rest. Notwithstanding the pains he hath taken to excuse and palliate the pagan superstition and idolatry, and to prove that they worshipped the one true God, the same that we adore, under various names, and by various attributes; yet he owns, that what were at first only different names came, in process of time, as superstition increased, to be regarded and worshipped as different gods. It is plain, from express and formal passages, produced by him from ancient writers, that some nations worshipped no other deities but the sun, moon, and stars. When in the third chapter of his book *de Relig. Gentil.* he mentions the names of the Deity which were in use among the Hebrews, and shows that those names and titles were also used among the Gentiles; he owneth that the Hebrews appropriated these names and titles to the one supreme God, superior to the sun, but that the Gentiles understood by them no other than the sun itself. He thinks it indeed probable that the worship they rendered to the sun was symbolical, and that they intended to worship God by the sun, as his most glorious sensible image; and sometimes he is very positive that they did so, and that they rendered no proper worship to any but the supreme God; but at other times he speaks very doubtfully about it, and pretends not positively to assert it, but leaves the reader to his own judgment in this matter.‡ And elsewhere he acknowledges, that the people perhaps did not sufficiently understand this symbolical worship. *Symbolicum illum cultum haud satis forsitan intellexit?* § It is indeed a little strange, that if the notion and belief of one only supreme God universally obtained among the Gentiles, none but the Hebrews should have made the acknowledgment of the one supreme God, the Maker and Lord of the universe, the fundamental article of their religion; and that in the laws of other states, particularly among the learned and polite nations of Greece and Rome, polytheism was established, and the

* De Relig. Gentil. p. 225.

† Ibid. p. 25, 310.

‡ Ibid. p. 27, 247.

§ Ibid. 293.

public worship was directed to be offered to a multiplicity of deities. Many of the heathens, by his own acknowledgment, thought that the God they were to worship should be visible, and looked upon it to be incongruous, that he who demanded worship from all should hide himself from his worshippers.* And though it was a notion which generally obtained among them, that some kind of external worship was necessary to be rendered to their deities, yet as to the manner of their worship he doth not deny that some of the heathen rites were ridiculous, others absurd, and even impious. To which it may be added, that some of their wisest men acknowledged, that they were ignorant of the proper manner in which God is to be worshipped, except he himself, or some person sent by him, should please to reveal it. There is a remarkable passage in Plato's second *Alcibiad*, which hath been often quoted. Socrates meeting Alcibiades, who was going to the temple to pray, proves to him that he knew not how to perform that duty aright, and that therefore it was not safe for him to do it; but that he should wait for a divine instructor to teach him how to behave both towards the gods and men; and that it was necessary that God should scatter the darkness which covered his soul, that he might be put in a condition to discern good and evil. To the same purpose, Iamblichus, in *Vita Pythag.* c. 28. speaking of the principles of divine worship, saith, "It is manifest that those things are to be done which are pleasing to God; but what they are it is not easy to know, except a man were taught them by God himself, or by some person that had received them from God, or obtained the knowledge of them by some divine means."

The third article mentioned by his Lordship as universally agreed on is, that piety and virtue are the principal part of God's worship. But not to argue that the proof he brings of an universal agreement in this principle seems to be very defective, this article would be of no great use, except men were also generally agreed as to the nature and extent of true piety and virtue. And it can scarce be reasonably denied, that a revelation from God, pointing out our way to us, and containing a clear signification of the divine will, with regard to the particulars of the duty required of us, would be of great use. Lord Herbert himself, after having mentioned some virtues which were honoured among the Pagans, acknowledgeth, that besides these there were many other things looked upon to be necessary to true piety, especially those things which showed a devout or grateful temper towards the gods, and the observance of the public rites and ceremonies of religion; which is in other words to say, that the joining in superstitious and idolatrous worship (for such the established public worship was) made up a necessary part of the heathen piety and virtue, and was counted a principal ingredient in a good man's character.

As to the fourth article, that men must repent of their sins, and

* De Relig. Gentil. p. 26.

† Ibid. 250.

that if they do so God will pardon them, it might easily be shown that the Gentiles were far from being agreed what are to be accounted sins; since some sins and vices of a very enormous kind were not only practised and pleaded for by some of their philosophers, but permitted and countenanced by the public laws, nor were they agreed what is included in a true repentance. His Lordship himself acknowledgeth, that the ancients seldom used the word repentance in the sense in which we take it;* and that they did not look upon it to be an atonement from all crimes, but for those of a less heinous nature; and that they generally looked upon other things to be also necessary, and laid the principal stress upon lustrations, and the rites of their religion, for purifying and absolving them from guilt. And any one who duly considers that the dispensing of pardon is an act of the divine prerogative, the exercise of which depends upon what seemeth most fit to his supreme governing wisdom, cannot but be sensible that it must needs be a great advantage to be assured, by an express revelation from God, upon what terms the pardon of sin is to be obtained, and how far it is to extend.

With regard to the fifth article, about future rewards and punishments, which he representeth to be, as it really is, of vast importance, though he sometimes expresses himself as if the heathens were generally agreed, that good men would be rewarded with eternal life; at other times he intimates that they only agreed in this, that there would be rewards and punishments in a future state; and sometimes that they held this only, that there would be rewards for good men, and punishments for bad men, either in this life or after it. And he himself frequently owns in his book *de Veritate*, that what kind of rewards shall be conferred, or punishments inflicted, cannot be certainly known from the light of natural reason.†

But we need not insist farther on these things. His Lordship himself fairly granteth, that the knowledge the Gentiles had of the the One Supreme God was lame and imperfect; which he attributes to the sloth or cunning of the priests, who neglected to instruct the people, or instructed them wrong; and that from thence it came to pass, that the rays of the divine light being intercepted, a wonderful darkness overspread the minds of the vulgar. “*Unde etiam factum, ut radius divini luminis interceptis, mira caligo vulgi animis obducta esset.*”‡ And he observes, that by what was added by the priests, poets, and philosophers, the whole fabric of truth was in danger of falling to the ground. *Tota inclinata in casumque prona nutavit veritatis fabrica.*§ And at the close of this book *de Relig. Gentil.* he owns, that at length the purer parts of divine worship being neglected, the whole of religion sunk by degrees into superstition: and that those five articles were almost overwhelmed with a heavy load of errors, so as to be perceived only by the wiser sort of men, *a perspicacioribus viris*, i. e. by those who had a penetration above the vulgar.||

* De Relig. Gentil. p. 268.

† De Relig. Gentil. p. 225.

‡ De Veritate, p. 57, et alibi.

§ Ibid. p. 283.

|| Ibid. p. 310.

Now, this being a true representation of the case as it stood in fact, whatever it was owing to, it can scarce be reasonably denied, that if God should, in compassion to the corrupt and ignorant state of mankind, grant an express revelation of his will, to clear and restore those great principles which had been so much obscured and perverted, to recover men to the right knowledge and worship of God, and to explain and enforce the main important parts of their duty, this would be of signal benefit to the world, and a remarkable proof and effect of his great goodness. His Lordship, indeed, in several parts of his works, throws out hints and suspicions as if either such a revelation from God could not be given, or at least that there can be no way of knowing, or being assured, that such a revelation has been really given; but he no where offers any proof of it. The general invectives he so frequently makes against priests, oracles, impostures, prove nothing; except it be allowed to be a reasonable principle, that because there have been false pretenders to revelation, therefore there never was nor can be a true one; a way of talking and reasoning this, that might pass among the inferior tribe of deistical writers, but which is absolutely unworthy of his Lordship's sense and learning. Whereas, it may rather be gathered from it, that mankind in all ages have been generally persuaded, that it was both possible for God to grant an extraordinary revelation of his will, and that, if he did it would be of great advantage. Impostors have built upon this principle; but this doth not show the principle itself to be false, which hath as good a title to pass for a common notion, as some of the five articles which he representeth to be so clear and universally acknowledged. The only reasonable conclusion that can be drawn from the many impostures and false revelations which have been put upon mankind is, not that all pretences to revelation are false and vain, but that we ought to be very careful to distinguish the false from the true, and impartially to consider and examine the proofs that are brought, and not to receive any revelation without sufficient credentials of its divine authority. But it would be a most unreasonable limitation of the divine power and wisdom to affirm, either that God cannot make extraordinary discoveries of his will to particular persons, in such a manner that the persons to whom they are immediately communicated may be certain that they came from God; or that he cannot commission and enable such persons to communicate to others what they have received from him, or cannot furnish them with such credentials of their divine mission, as may be sufficient to convince the world that they were sent of God, and to make it reasonable for others to receive the doctrines and laws which such persons deliver in his name. And it hath been proved, with great strength and evidence, that this hath actually been the case with regard to the Christian revelation.

There are other reflections that might be made on Lord Herbert's system. But I am willing to give you and myself a little respite, and shall therefore reserve them to be the subject of another letter.

LETTER II.

Farther Observations on Lord Herbert's Scheme.—The Philosophers not qualified to recover Mankind from the Darkness and Corruption into which they were fallen.—The Usefulness of the Christian Revelation to that Purpose.—Its not having been universally promulgated in all Nations and Ages, no just prejudice against it.—Other Objections of Lord Herbert considered.—Writers that have appeared against him.

SIR,

IN my former letter an account was given of Lord Herbert's scheme; and it was shown that, taking the state of mankind and of the Gentile world as it really was, according to his own representation of the case, an express revelation from God, confirmed by his divine authority, for clearing and enforcing those articles which his Lordship supposeth to be necessary, would be of great use. I now add, that in fact the Christian revelation hath been of signal advantage to the world, for giving men a clearer knowledge and fuller certainty of those important truths than they had before. Our noble author indeed speaks with admiration of the ancient philosophers, as capable of instructing men in a proper manner, if they would have attended to their instructions: but then he owns, that the people had little regard to the purer doctrine of the philosophers.* And, indeed, I do not see how it could be expected that they should place any dependence upon their dictates, which were for the most part regarded only as the tenets of their several schools, in which the people had little concern. They were not the ministers of religion, nor could pretend to any authority that should make them be regarded as the guides and instructors of mankind, or cause their opinions to pass for laws. The most eminent among them were contradicted by others of great name: many of them laboured to make all things appear doubtful and uncertain; and those of them that had the noblest notions frequently affected to conceal them, or were afraid to divulge them. What Alcinous hath observed concerning Plato, with respect to the inquiry concerning the chief good, might be applied to some other matters of great importance. "That which is worthy of all honour, such is the supreme Good, he conceived not easy to be found, and, if found, not safe to be declared."† His Lordship assureth us, that the philosophers were always displeased with the superstitious worship of the people. But, if this was the case, they seem to have been very improper persons to reclaim them from it, since it was an universal maxim among them, and particularly recommended by one of the best of them, Epictetus, that

* De Relig. Gentil. p. 310.

† See Alcinous's Doctrine of Plato, C. 27, in Stanley's Lives of the Philosophers.

every man ought to worship according to the laws or customs of his country: * and it is well known that their established worship was polytheism and idolatry. Varro, in a passage quoted by his Lordship, divides the heathen theology into three kinds; the *fabulous*, which belonged to the poets; the *physical*, which was that of the philosophers; and the *civil*. He speaks with disregard of the two former, and represents the last as that in which the people were concerned, and which alone could be of real use to them: and this he explaineth to be that which was established by the laws, and administered by the priests, and which showed what gods they were publicly to worship, what rites they were to observe, and what sacrifices it was proper for any man to offer.†

If a reformation of the world by the philosophers was not to be expected, for the reasons now given, his Lordship will own it was not to be hoped for from the priests, against whom he bitterly inveighs, as the author of all superstition, and of the great corruption of religion in the heathen world. And as little was it to be expected from the lawgivers and great men of the state, who generally patronized the established superstition, of which they themselves had been in a great measure the authors or promoters, and were ready to punish any that opposed it. And if there were any of them who were for reforming and correcting some abuses in the public superstitions, and exploding some of the grosser fables that were received among the people, as his Lordship observes Mutius Scaevola the chief Pontiff, and Varro, were for doing, he owns that the attempts were vain and ineffectual, because the errors and superstitions were become inveterate.‡ This being the true state of the case, it is hard to see what other method could be taken, that would prove so effectual to recover mankind from their superstition and idolatry, as the giving an extraordinary revelation, attended with sufficient credentials, to instruct men in the name of God, concerning the nature of true religion, to assure them of the certainty of its great principles, and to enforce the practice of its important duties by the strongest and most prevailing motives.

And, accordingly, when Christianity appeared with the most illustrious attestations of a divine mission and revelation from heaven, it effected what no precepts or doctrines of the philosophers had been able to do. The pagan polytheism and superstition fell before it: and it hath actually produced this great advantage, that the principles upon which our author layeth so much stress have been better known and understood, and more universally acknowledged, than they were before. It is incontestable, that Christians are more generally agreed in those great principles, than ever men were in the pagan world. They are set in a clearer light, and men come to a greater certainty about them. That they are so far preserved among the Mahometans, was also originally owing to the light of the Jewish and Christian revelations. And it is very probable that his Lordship

* Epict. *Enchirid.* c. 38. † De Relig. Gentil. p. 306, 307. ‡ Ibid. p. 311.

himself is very much obliged to Christianity, though he doth not acknowledge it, for the full persuasion he every where expresseth as to these important articles; several of which were denied by some, and doubted by others of the ancient philosophers.

Though, therefore, it is not to be wondered at, that those among the deists who have an aversion to these principles, when taken in their just extent, should be against Christianity, yet Lord Herbert, who asserteth them to be of such vast consequence, ought, one should think, to have been very thankful to God for having enforced them by an express and well attested revelation, and given them a divine sanction. And if he were sincere in the acknowledgment he sometimes makes, that the explaining and enforcing those great principles is the ultimate design of the holy Scripture, to which all its doctrines, and even its rights and sacraments tend, he ought certainly to have entertained very favourable thoughts of Christianity, of its doctrines as well as precepts, and even of its rites and positive institutions.

But that which seemeth principally to have prejudiced his Lordship against Christianity is, that it is what he calleth a *particular religion*; whereas the true religion must be universal, and promulgated to all mankind. He frequently urgeth that nothing less than such an universal religion as he pleadeth for can support the honour of God's universal providence, and the care he exerciseth towards the whole human race; which no particular religion can do; and that otherwise the Gentiles must be supposed to be universally lost and damned, which it were cruel and injurious to God to imagine. This is what hath been often urged and repeated by the deists since.

To this it may be justly answered, that those who maintain the Christian revelation may think as honourably as any others consistently can, of the universal care and providence of God towards mankind. No where is this more clearly asserted than in the sacred writings, which declare God's universal goodness and benignity towards the human race in strong terms; and that he hath been continually doing them good, and hath never left himself without witness among them. We must not indeed carry this so far as to assert that all men have an actual knowledge of the great principles of religion, and of their duty, because we may imagine that the universal care of providence towards mankind requireth that it should be so; which seems to be the course of his Lordship's reasoning; for this is contrary to evident and undeniable fact and experience. But we acknowledge that God hath given to all men the principle of reason, together with a natural sense of right and wrong, which would be of great use to assist them in the knowledge of religion, and to direct them in the practice of their duty, if duly cultivated and improved to the utmost that it is naturally capable of. But besides this, Christians generally maintain, and the holy Scriptures lead us to think, that God hath from time to time made extraordinary discoveries of his will to mankind; that some such discoveries were made to the first ancestors of the human race, who were bound

by all obligations to transmit them to their posterity; that therefore there was an original universal religion, embraced by the first parents of mankind, and transmitted from them to their descendants; that accordingly some of the most eminent ancient philosophers ascribed the knowledge and belief of some of the great principles insisted upon by this noble author, to a tradition derived from the most early ages, though his Lordship never maketh the least mention of tradition, as one source of that knowledge and belief of these things, which obtaineth among the nations; that this religion, which was both originally derived from revelation, and agreeable to nature and reason, was gradually obscured, and became greatly corrupted, though still some remarkable traces and vestiges of it remained among the Gentiles; that God was pleased, in his wise and good providence, to interpose by various methods, and by raising up excellent persons from time to time to keep those remains of the ancient religion from being totally extinguished; that at last he was graciously pleased to send his Son into the world, a person of divine dignity and glory, to recover men to his true knowledge and pure worship, to direct and assist them in the practice of their duty, to show them the true means of their reconciliation and acceptance with God, and to bring life and immortality into the most clear and open light; that this revelation was attended with the most illustrious attestations, and made a wonderful progress through a considerable part of the known world, and would have spread still farther, if it had met with such a reception as the excellency and importance of it well deserved; and finally, that as to those to whom it was actually communicated, God will deal with them in a just, a wise, and equitable way, and will make all proper allowances for any want of the advantages which others enjoy. The asserters of the Christian revelation are under no obligations to limit God's universal benevolence. They leave those that are destitute of this revelation to God's infinite mercy; and can think more favourably of their case, than those consistently can do, who will not allow that they were under any great darkness, and suppose them to have acted in manifest opposition to the most clear universal light.

The objection arising against the Christian revelation, for want of its being universally known and promulgated, hath been often considered and obviated, nor is this a proper place to enter upon a large particular discussion of it. At present it may be sufficient to observe that the objection proceeds upon a wrong foundation, *viz.*, that the universal goodness and benignity of the common Parent of the universe require that he should communicate his benefits to all his creatures alike, and in equal degrees. It is evident, in fact, that in the distribution of his benefits God acteth as a free and sovereign benefactor, dispensing them in very various degrees, always undoubtedly for wise reasons, but those reasons often not known to us. It cannot reasonably be denied, that he hath made some whole classes of being superior to others in valuable gifts and endowments, and capacities for happiness; and some individuals of the same class

of beings are favoured with much greater advantages than others. And, if we look particularly into God's dealings with the human race, we may observe a very remarkable variety. Some are from the beginning endued with much greater natural abilities and more excellent dispositions, and are placed in a more favourable situation and happier circumstances. Some whole nations are eminently distinguished from others, not only with respect to many other advantages of human life, but with respect to the means of moral improvement, and are furnished with more excellent helps for making a progress in wisdom and virtue, and consequently in true happiness. All these differences between persons and nations are under the direction of divine providence, as all must own that acknowledgeth a providence, as his Lordship professeth to do. And those that are distinguished from others by superior advantages, ought to be thankful to God for those advantages, and to ascribe them to his goodness, and not deny that God hath given them those advantages, because there are others that have them not, or not in an equal degree. Since therefore the distinguishing some persons and nations with valuable advantages above others is not inconsistent with the universal benignity of the great Parent of mankind (for if it were, he would not do it), it can never be proved, that he may not grant a revelation to any part of mankind, except at the same time it be granted equally to the whole world. Indeed, if all men every where were required actually to believe that revelation, and were to be condemned for not believing it, it would be necessary to have it universally promulgated : but since the actual belief of it is required of those only to whom it is actually published, and they to whom it is not made known are not put into a worse condition than if there had been no such revelation granted at all, no argument can be brought to show that it is inconsistent with the divine wisdom or goodness, to grant such a revelation to some part of mankind, though it be not actually promulgated to the whole human race ; especially if, in its own nature and original intention, it was fitted and designed to be of universal extent ; which is the case of the Christian revelation. Those therefore who are so circumstanced as to have an opportunity of knowing it, ought to be very thankful to God on that account, and not refuse or reject their own advantages and privileges, because all others are not partakers of them as well as they. This would be a most absurd and irrational conduct.

I shall only further observe, that this author seems frequently to make it a great objection against what he calls *particular religion*, that it insisteth upon other things as necessary, besides the religion of nature, as contained in these five articles. Religion, according to him, is *notitiarum communium symbolum*,* a creed containing common notions of truths ; and these common notices he reduceth to the five above-mentioned. But will any man undertake to prove, that God cannot reveal any truths to mankind, but precisely these

* De Verit. p. 55. 221.

five articles, or that all useful religious knowledge is wholly absorpt in them? May there not be truths which, though not precisely the same with those articles, may be of great use for clearing and confirming them, for instructing men in the fuller knowledge of God, and of his will, and of the methods of his grace towards us, or for directing us in our duty, and animating us to the practice of it? And must all these be discarded at once, as of no use in religion, because they are distinct from the articles so often referred to? Or must a well-attested revelation be rejected, because it containeth some things of this kind? Our noble author himself, though he supposes these articles to be absolutely necessary, seems not to be quite sure that they are sufficient: for he observes, that God's judgments and proceedings are not fully known to any man: and therefore he will not take upon him positively to pronounce, that these articles are sufficient. *Quam ob causam neque eos sufficere protinus dixerim.** But if they should be supposed to comprehend all that is required from the heathens, who never had the light of the Christian revelation, it doth not follow that they are also alone sufficient for those to whom this revelation is made known: for supposing God to give an extraordinary revelation of his will for restoring religion when greatly corrupted, and clearly directing men in the way of salvation, and helping forward their improvement in divine knowledge, and in a holy and virtuous practice, as it would be a signal advantage to those to whom such a revelation is given, so it must necessarily lay them under additional obligations. Some things would, in consequence of it, be necessary to be believed and done, by those to whom this revelation is made known, which they were not so expressly obliged to believe and practise before: and it would be a strange thing to complain against that revelation on this account, or accuse it of falsehood, and to choose rather to be without the signal advantage of such a revelation, and its glorious benefits, privileges, and hopes, than to be obliged to receive the discoveries it brings, and to practise the duties which result from them.

One of the first English writers that published animadversions on Lord Herbert's scheme (for I shall not take notice of what some learned foreigners have done this way) was Mr. Richard Baxter, in a book published in 1671, which he calls *More Reasons for the Christian Religion, and no Reason against it*: and which he designed as an appendix to his excellent treatise of the reasons of the Christian religion. One part of this book contains, "Animadversions on a Tractate *de Veritate*, written by the noble and learned Lord Edward Herbert, Baron of Cherbury." This writer makes judicious reflections on several passages in that book, but takes no notice of his Tract *de Religione Laici*, nor of that learned work *de Religione Gentilium*, which probably he had not seen. The celebrated Mr. Locke, in his *Essay on Human Understanding*, hath some observations on Lord Herbert's five articles, to show, that, however reason-

* De Relig. Gentil. p. 293.

able they may appear to be, they cannot be justly accounted common notices in the sense in which that Lord represents them; viz. as clearly inscribed by the hand of God in the minds of all men.* And in his *Reasonableness of Christianity as delivered in the Scriptures*, he hath, without formally mentioning Lord Herbert, furnished a proper antidote against his scheme, by showing, with great clearness and force, the usefulness of divine revelation, for setting the great principles of the law of nature, and the important duties of religion and morality in a strong and convincing light, and enforcing them with the most powerful motives; and that the mere natural unassisted light of reason was, as things were circumstanced, insufficient and ineffectual for that purpose.† This matter is also fully and distinctly treated in Dr. Whitby's learned work, intituled, *The Necessity and Usefulness of the Christian Revelation, by Reason of the Corruptions of the Principles of natural Religion among Jews and Heathens*. London, 8vo. 1705.

The only author among us, that I know, who hath formally considered the whole of Lord Herbert's scheme, and undertaken a direct answer to his writings, is the reverend Mr. Halyburton, professor of divinity in the University of St. Andrews, in a book which was published after the author's death, at Edinburgh, in 1714, 4to. intituled, *Natural Religion insufficient, and Revealed necessary to Man's Happiness*—"in which, particularly, the writings of the learned Lord Herbert, the great patron of Deism; to wit, his books *de Veritate*, *de Religione Gentilium*, and his *Religio Laici*, in so far as they assert nature's light able to conduct us to future blessedness, are considered, and fully answered." In this elaborate performance he sets himself largely and distinctly to show that the light of nature is greatly defective, even with respect to the discoveries of a Deity, and the worship that is to be rendered to him; with respect to the inquiry concerning man's true happiness; with respect to the rule of duty, and the motives for enforcing obedience: that it is unable certainly to discover the means of obtaining pardon of sin, or to eradicate inclinations to sin, and subdue its power. And, lastly, he argues its insufficiency, from a general view of the experience of the world. He afterwards proceeds distinctly to consider the five articles to which the Lord Herbert reduces his catholic religion. He answers the proofs his Lordship has brought to show that these articles did universally obtain; and, on the contrary, offers several proofs to show that they did not so obtain. And he endeavours distinctly to answer the principal arguments and pleas urged by Lord Herbert, and, after him, by Mr. Blount, for the sufficiency of natural religion. Whosoever carefully examines what this learned and pious author has offered on these several heads will find many excellent things; though the narrowness of his notions in some points hath prejudiced some persons against his work, and

* Essay on Human Understanding, book i. c. 3, §. 15, 16, 17, 18, 19.

† See his works, vol. ii. p. 574, & seq. 4th edit.

hindered them from regarding and considering it so much as it deserves.

I shall here conclude my account of Lord Herbert, in which I have been the more particular, because as he was one of the first, so he was confessedly one of the greatest writers that have appeared among us in the deistical cause.

POSTSCRIPT.

A remarkable Incident relating to Lord Herbert considered.

SIR,

AFTER I had finished the two foregoing letters, I saw a large anonymous letter, which was sent to you, and by you communicated to me, relating to Lord Herbert of Cherbury. This letter deserves particular notice; and what I have to observe upon it may be properly inserted here, immediately after the observations which have been made upon that noble writer in the preceding letters. I readily agree with this gentleman in acknowledging, what, as he observes, Mr. Baxter owns in his animadversions on Lord Herbert's tract *de Veritate*, that there are excellent things in that book, and that many of the rules there proposed may be of great use. But I had no occasion to take particular notice of them, as I proposed only to make some general observations on his Lordship's scheme, as far as the cause of Christianity is concerned. I hope the writer of that letter, who appears to be a man of sense, and a friend to Christianity, as well as a great admirer of Lord Herbert, will find, on perusing the foregoing reflections, that I have done his Lordship justice, and not pushed the charge against him farther than there is just ground for it. What I have there said is perfectly agreeable to what this ingenious gentleman has observed in this letter; where, after having said that Lord Herbert is commonly reputed to have been the first starter of Deism in the last century, he adds, "Supposing the charge to be true, as I greatly suspect it is, yet I am convinced upon several good reasons, that he was nevertheless a deist of more honour, and of greater candour and decency, as he was of far greater parts and learning, than many that have appeared under that denomination since." He subjoins, "Had he lived in these days, wherein the subject, then new, has been thoroughly canvassed, and no stone left unturned to find out the truth, and bring it into fair light, I own I have charity enough to suppose, and almost to believe, that Lord Herbert would either have been an advocate for revelation, or at least have forborne opposing it."

This gentleman takes notice of a manuscript which he had lately seen, containing the life of the Lord Herbert of Cherbury, drawn up from memorials penned by himself, and which is now in the possession of a gentleman of distinction whom he does not name. He

mentions that Lord's good conduct when he was ambassador at Paris, and some other things that do not come within the compass of my design, which is not to give an account of the lives and characters of the authors I mention, but only to consider their writings, and these no farther than they relate to the controversy between the Christians and the deists. But there is one thing in that manuscript life of Lord Herbert, which the writer of the anonymous letter calls a *surprising incident*, and which is indeed of such a nature, that I cannot pass it by without a particular notice.

After having observed that Lord Herbert's tract *de Veritate* was his favourite work, he produceth a large extract relating to it, in that Lord's own words, signifying, that though it had been approved by some very learned men to whom he had shown it, among whom he mentions Grotius, yet as the frame of his whole book was so different from what had been written heretofore on this subject, and he apprehended he should meet with much opposition, he did consider, whether it were not better for him for a while to suppress it. And then his Lordship proceeds thus :

" Being thus doubtful, in my chamber, one fair day in the summer, my casement being open towards the south, the sun shining clear, and no wind stirring, I took my book *de Veritate* in my hands, and, kneeling on my knees, devoutly said these words. *O thou eternal God, author of this light which now shines upon me, and giver of all inward illuminations ; I do beseech thee, of thine infinite goodness, to pardon a greater request than a sinner ought to make : I am not satisfied enough, whether I shall publish this book : if it be for thy glory, I beseech thee give me some sign from heaven ; if not I shall suppress it.* I had no sooner spoken these words, but a loud, though yet gentle noise, came forth from the heavens (for it was like nothing on earth) ; which did so cheer and comfort me, that I took my petition as granted, and that I had the sign I demanded ; whereupon also I resolved to print my book. This, how strange soever it may seem, I protest before the eternal God, is true : neither am I any way superstitiously deceived herein : since I did not only clearly hear the noise, but in the serenest sky that ever I saw, being without all cloud, did, to my thinking, see the place from whence it came."

The ingenious writer of the letter says, he will make no remarks on this incident, but sends it as he finds it ; but he makes no doubt, that some observations upon this and other things in that life would be acceptable to the friends of religion.

I shall mention some reflections that have occurred to me upon this occasion.

I have no doubt of his Lordship's sincerity in this account. The seriousness with which he relates it, and the solemn protestation he makes, as in the presence of the eternal God, will not suffer us to question the truth of what he relates ; viz. that he both made that address to God which he mentions, and that, in consequence of this, he was persuaded that he heard the noise he takes notice of, and

which he took to come from heaven, and regarded as a mark of God's approbation of the request he had made; and accordingly this great man was determined by it to publish this book. He seems to have considered it as a kind of imprimatur given to it from heaven, and as signifying the divine approbation of the book itself, and of what was contained in it.

I cannot help thinking, that if any writer, zealous for Christianity, had given such an account of himself, as praying for and expecting a sign from heaven to determine his doubt, whether he should publish a book he had composed in favour of the Christian cause; and upon hearing a noise, which he took to be from heaven, had looked upon it as a mark of the divine approbation, and as a call to publish that book; it would have passed for a high fit of enthusiasm, and would no doubt have subjected the author to much ridicule among the gentlemen that oppose revealed religion. What judgment they will pass upon it in Lord Herbert's case I do not know: but considering the great partiality they have often shown in their own favour and against Christianity, it is not improbable, that some of them may be apt to interpret this incident as giving a divine sanction to a book, which contains indeed several important truths, but withal hath some principles which are unfavourable to the Christian religion; or at least, they may be willing to have it believed that this is as much to be depended upon as the signs and attestations said to be given from heaven to the first preachers and publishers of the gospel revelation.

There are some things observable in Lord Herbert's solemn address to God which, I think, are highly commendable, and would incline one to think very favourably of his Lordship's intentions. He discovereth in it a great veneration for the Deity, and a deep sense of his dependence upon him as the *author of light, and the giver of all inward illuminations*. This is agreeable to the sentiments of the best and wisest men in all ages; but yet I think it may be justly doubted, whether an address of such a particular kind as that made by his Lordship was proper or regular. It does not seem to me, that we are well founded to apply for or to expect an extraordinary sign from heaven, for determining doubts concerning the expediency of publishing a book. Methinks, if a man hath used his best endeavours to find out truth, and (which certainly ought not to be neglected) hath humbly applied to God to assist and direct him in his inquiries; if he hath the testimony of his own conscience to the uprightness of his own intentions, and that he is not actuated by pride and vain glory, by an affectation of singularity or any worldly sinister ends and views; and if he is satisfied, upon the most diligent and impartial examination, that what he hath advanced is both true and of great importance to mankind, and is only afraid of the opposition it may meet with; I think, in such a case, especially if he hath also the advice of good and judicious friends concerning it, he hath sufficient grounds to proceed upon, and doth not need a particular sign from heaven to determine him.

This seems to be a putting it on a wrong foot, since God hath not in his word given us any ground to expect that he will answer such a request; nor is there any reason to expect it from the nature of the thing. His Lordship himself seems to have suspected that such an address and expectation was not regular, when he begs of God to *pardon* it, as being a *greater request than a sinner ought to make*. I believe it will be acknowledged, that sudden impressions, or supposed signs from heaven, like that upon which Lord Herbert seemeth to lay so great a stress, are very equivocal, and not much to be depended upon for information in truth, or direction in duty: They may lay persons open to mistake and delusion. It cannot be denied, that, in such cases, men are in danger of being imposed upon by the warmth of their own imaginations, especially if they be wrought up to a strong desire and expectation of an extraordinary sign from heaven, in favour of a design which they heartily wish should succeed.

I think it is evident, from his own account of it, that this was Lord Herbert's case. His mind was full of his book, highly prepossessed in favour of its truth and usefulness. He seems not to have been diffident of the truth and goodness of the book itself, but only to have been in doubt about the expediency of its publication; and he took a very extraordinary way to obtain direction concerning it. Nothing less would satisfy him than a sign from heaven; and it is plain that he was big with expectation. His imagination was warmed with the hope of a sign that should be a mark of the divine approbation. It is not to be wondered at, that a mind thus prepared should be disposed to interpret any incident that should happen, in favour of its own prepossessions, and as countenancing the purpose he had entertained in his own breast. Taking it in this view, nothing happened, but what may reasonably enough be accounted for, without supposing anything supernatural in the case. He doth not mention any articulate voice, or words spoken to him as from heaven, directing him what to do, or signifying an approbation of his design; he only maketh mention of a noise that seemed to him to come from heaven. He giveth no particular account what kind of noise it was, but only that it was *loud and yet gentle*, and that *it came from heaven, for it was like nothing on earth*; that it was in *a serene sky*, and that *to his thinking, he saw the place from whence it came*. In this situation of his mind, any noise that happened at that precise juncture, and which had something unusual in it (and it is easy to suppose several things of this kind), might be apt to make an impression on his imagination. I shall only put one supposition, and it is this, that at that time it might happen to thunder at a distance, which might well be in summer-time, though in that part of the sky which was within his view there was no cloud to be seen, and all seemed perfectly serene; and the "noise of thunder heard remote" (to use Milton's phrase) coming at that instant when the soul was filled with expectation of something extraordinary, would undoubtedly greatly affect him, and

might be regarded as a sign of approbation from heaven, which was what he sought for; and then no wonder that it comforted and cheered him, as his Lordship observes it did.

It is, I must confess, a great satisfaction to me to reflect, that the evidence of the Christian religion doth not depend upon such equivocal signs as this. The attestations given to the first preachers and publishers of the gospel were of such a kind, that, supposing them to have really happened, they could not reasonably, or with the least appearance of probability, be ascribed to anything but a divine interposition; and therefore might justly be regarded as marks of the divine approbation of the Christian scheme.

Upon this occasion, I cannot help drawing some kind of parallel in my own mind, between this incident that happened to this noble Lord, and that extraordinary appearance from heaven which St. Paul gives an account of; and which, with what followed upon it, had such an effect upon him, as to conquer his obstinate prejudices, and to engage him to profess and preach that faith in Christ which he himself had zealously persecuted before. I believe the warmest advocates for Christianity would be ready to own, that if that great apostle had had no better account to give of the reasons and motives of his conversion than such a sign from heaven as Lord Herbert mentions, this would have been a very slender foundation either for himself or others to go upon, in receiving the Christian doctrine as of divine original. But the slightest comparison of the cases may let us see that there is a wide and amazing difference between them. Lord Herbert's mind was prepossessed with the expectation of a sign from heaven; he sought it, he applied to God for it, he had an hope that something of this kind would happen: and when the thing came which he took for a sign, it was in favour of what he no doubt strongly wished and desired before: yet, prepossessed as his imagination was, he heard no voice of words, nor articulate language, signifying to him the divine will. But St. Paul was the farthest in the world from desiring or expecting a sign from heaven in favour of the religion of Jesus: on the contrary, his mind was at that very instant wholly possessed with the strongest prejudices against it. He was then going to Damascus, with a commission from the high-priest to seize the disciples of Jesus, and bring them to Jerusalem to be punished; and he was persuaded in his own conscience that he was right in doing so. He *breathed out threatnings and slaughter* against them, as the sacred writer expresseth it: and he himself tells us, that *he verily thought with himself, that he ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth*. In this circumstance of things, if we should suppose him seized with a sudden pang of enthusiasm, though this is by no means likely to have happened to him, as he was travelling along the road at noon-day, with several others in his company; but if we should suppose that something of this kind happened to him, and that he saw an extraordinary light from heaven, which he took to be a sign that heaven approved the work in which he was then engaged; or if he had

thought he also heard a voice from above speaking to him, and animating him to go on, and courageously to execute the commission he had received from the high-priest, and promising him success in it, there might possibly be some pretence for ascribing it to the working of an over-heated imagination, filled with the design he was upon, which engaged all his thoughts and resolutions. But it is plain that, in the temper he was then in, he could not have the least expectation of Jesus of Nazareth's appearing to him with a celestial splendour and glory, calling to him with a majestic voice from heaven, and in words which he distinctly heard, reproving him for his enmity to him, and persecuting rage against his disciples, appointing him his minister and apostle, and commissioning him to preach the gospel to the Gentiles, and to invite them to a participation of the benefits and privileges of his kingdom; which were things the most remote from his apprehension that could possibly be conceived.

I need not here particularly repeat all the circumstances of a story so well known as that of the divine appearance which occasioned St. Paul's conversion; but taking in the whole as he himself relateth it, it is absolutely impossible that it should have been the effect of his own enthusiastic imagination, considering how his mind was at that time disposed, to which may be added the consequent effects which showed the reality of it. Struck blind with the glory of the appearance, he was obliged to be led to Damascus; and it was only by the laying on of Ananias' hands in the name of Jesus, that he had his sight restored. There was immediately a wonderful change in his dispositions, notions, and inclinations. He became enlightened at once, without human instruction, in a perfect knowledge of the religion of Jesus, than which nothing could be more contrary in many points to the pharisaical principles and prejudices he had so deeply imbibed. He was endued with the most extraordinary gifts of the Holy Ghost, and had a power of communicating those gifts to others, by the laying on of his hands in the name of a crucified and risen Jesus and in the same sacred name was enabled to perform the most illustrious miracles. These were matters of fact in which he could not be deceived himself, and of which there were numbers of witnesses: and accordingly he went through the nations preaching Jesus Christ, and him crucified, as the Saviour and Lord; which he did with such evidence, and had such extraordinary attestations from heaven accompanying him, that vast numbers were brought over by his ministry to embrace a religion which was absolutely contrary to their most rooted prejudices, inclinations, and interests.

There might possibly be some suspicions with regard to the relation of a fact so circumstanced as was that of Lord Herbert. It might be thought possible, that an author might feign an approbation from heaven in favour of some peculiar notions he had entertained, and of a book of which he was very fond, and upon which he seems to have valued himself: not that I think there is any

reasonable ground of suspicion, that this noble writer feigned what he relates concerning this incident; but yet some may suppose, that an author might possibly be under some temptation to deviate from the rules of truth in such a case. But no such suspicion can be entertained in St. Paul's case, that he should have feigned a heavenly appearance in favour of a religion which he was well known to have hated, persecuted, and despised, and which was absolutely contrary to the prejudices to which he had been so obstinately addicted, and to all his worldly expectations, connections, and interests: to which it may be added, that he gave the highest possible proof of his own sincere belief of the fact as he has related it, by his inviolable adherence to that religion to which he was by this extraordinary means converted; that he exposed himself by it to the different persecutions, and to the greatest and most various labours and sufferings that any one man ever endured; and which he bore with an invincible constancy, and even with a divine exultation and joy, supported by the testimony of a good conscience, and the hope of a glorious reward in the heavenly world.

Upon the whole, let us put the supposition, that Lord Herbert, in the account he hath given of what happened to him, has had the strictest regard to truth (which, for my part, I have no doubt of), and that the account St. Paul hath given of the extraordinary appearance to him from heaven is also true, there is this vast difference between the cases: that, granting all that happened to Lord Herbert to have been as he relates it, there is nothing in it but what may be accounted for in some such manner as that mentioned above, without supposing any thing supernatural in the case; but, granting the truth of the relation which St. Paul gives of the divine appearance to him, with the effects that followed upon it, there is no possibility of accounting for it in a natural way, or indeed in any other manner than by owning an extraordinary and supernatural interposition. Though therefore the former, granting it to be true, can by no means be depended upon as a certain mark of the approbation of heaven given to Lord Herbert's book; yet the latter, supposing it in like manner true, affordeth a convincing proof of an extraordinary attestation given from heaven to the divine mission and glory of a crucified Jesus, and to the truth and divine original of the Christian revelation.

I may perhaps be thought to have expatiated too much in my reflections on this occasion; but I hope I shall be excused when it is considered, that the incident is of so uncommon a nature; that it relateth to a person of Lord Herbert's character and eminence; and that the account of it is extracted from memorials written by himself.

I shall make no farther remarks on the anonymous letter, than to observe, that the writer of it makes mention of the answers to Lord Herbert, published by Mr. Baxter and Mr. Halyburton. He also takes notice of the Weekly Miscellany, as having lately appeared against him. The two former I have taken notice of above; the

latter I have not seen, and therefore know not how far some of the observations there made may have coincided with mine.

LETTER III.

Observations on Mr. Hobbes's Writings.—He sometimes professeth a Regard to the Scripture as the Word and Law of God; at other times ridicules Inspiration or Revelation.—He attempts to invalidate the sacred Canon, and makes Religion and the Authority of Scripture to depend entirely on the Authority of the Magistrate.—His strange Maxims in Morality and Politics.—His Scheme tends to subvert Natural Religion as well as Revealed.—Confuted by several learned Authors.

SIR,

IN my two former letters some observations were made on the writings of that eminent deist, Lord Herbert of Cherbury. The next writer I shall mention was in several respects of a different character from that noble Lord, though also very famous in his time, the noted Mr. Thomas Hobbes of Malmsbury. There have been few persons whose writings have had a more pernicious influence in spreading irreligion and infidelity than his; yet as none of his treatises are directly levelled against revealed religion, I shall content myself with some brief general reflections upon them. He sometimes affects to speak with veneration of the sacred writings. He expressly declareth, that though the laws of nature are not laws as they proceed from nature, yet, "as they are given by God in holy Scripture, they are properly called laws; for the holy Scripture is the voice of God, ruling all things by the greatest right."* But though he seems here to make the laws of Scripture to be the laws of God, and to derive their force from his supreme authority, yet in many other passages, some of which I shall have occasion to mention, he supposeth them to have no authority but what they derive from the prince or civil power. He sometimes seems to acknowledge inspiration to be a supernatural gift, and the immediate hand of God; at other times he treats the pretence to it as a sign of madness; and, by a jingle upon the words, represents God's speaking to the ancient prophets in a dream or vision, to be no more than their dreaming that he spoke to them, or *dreaming between sleeping and waking*.† To weaken the authority of the sacred Canon, he endeavours to show, that the books of Moses, and the historical writings of the Old Testament, were not written by

* De Cive, cap. iii. sect. 33.

† Leviath. p. 196.

those whose names they bear, and that they are derived to us from no other authority but that of Esdras, who restored them when they were lost :* a supposition in which he hath been since followed by others on the same side, and very lately by a noble Lord ; though the absurdity of it is manifest, and hath been fully exposed.† As to the writings of the New Testament, he acknowledgeth, that they are as ancient as the times of the apostles, and that they were written by persons who lived in those times, some of whom saw the things which they relate ; which is what many of our modern deists seem unwilling to own. And though he insinuates that the copies of the Scriptures were but few, and only in the hands of the ecclesiastics, yet he adds, that he sees no reason to doubt, but that the books of the New Testament, as we have them, are the true registers of those things which were done and said by the prophets and apostles.‡ But then he most absurdly pretends, that they were not received as of divine authority in the Christian church, till they were declared to be so by the council of Laodicea, in the year after Christ 364 : though nothing is capable of a clearer proof, than that their authority was acknowledged among Christians from the apostolic times.

He expressly asserts, that we have no assurance of the certainty of Scripture, but the *authority of the church*, and this he resolveth into the *authority of the commonwealth* ; and declares, that till the sovereign ruler had prescribed them, “ the precepts of Scripture were not obligatory laws, but only counsel and advice, which he that was counselled might without injustice refuse to observe, and being contrary to the laws could not without injustice observe ;” that the word of the interpreter of Scripture is the word of God, and the sovereign magistrate is the interpreter of Scripture, and of all doctrines, to whose authority we must stand.§ Yea, he carrieth it so far as to pronounce, that Christians are bound in conscience to obey the laws of an infidel king in matters of religion ; that “ thought is free ; but when it comes to confession of faith, the private reason must submit to the public, that is to say, to God’s lieutenant.” And accordingly, he alloweth the subject, being commanded by the sovereign, to deny Christ in words, holding firmly in his heart the faith of Christ : and that in that case, “ it is not he that denieth Christ before men, but his governor and the laws of his country.|| And he expressly declareth, that idolatry to which a man is compelled by the terror of death is not idolatry. And this being the case, it is not to be wondered at, that he speaks with contempt of the ancient martyrs. In this the succeeding deists have not failed to imitate him. They have reproached those excellent persons as having *died as a fool dieth* ;¶ as if it were a ridiculous

* Leviath. p. 200, 201, 203.

† Reflections on Lord Bolingbroke’s Letters, p. 51, &c.

‡ Leviath. p. 204.

§ Quest. concerning Liberty, p. 136. De Cive, c. 17. Leviath. p. 169, 283, 284.

|| Ibid. p. 238, 271.

¶ See Christianity not founded on Argument, p. 32, 33.

and senseless thing to endure hardships and sufferings, for the sake of truth and conscience : and yet those have been always justly admired, who have exposed themselves to the greatest dangers in a noble cause, and who would not do a base thing to save their lives.

Mr. Hobbes acknowledgeth the existence of God, and that we must of necessity arise from the effects which we behold, to the eternal Power of all powers, and Cause of all causes ; and he blames those as absurd who call the world, or the soul of the world, God : but he denies that we know any more of him than that he exists, and seems plainly to make him corporeal ; for he affirms, that that which is not body is nothing at all :* and though he sometimes seems to acknowledge religion and its obligations, and that there is an honour and worship due to God, prayer, thanksgiving, oblations, &c., yet he advanceth principles which evidently tend to subvert all religion. The account he gives of it is this, “ that from the fear of power invisible, feigned by the mind, or imagined from tales publicly allowed, ariseth religion, not allowed superstition.” And he elsewhere resolveth religion into things which he himself derides ; viz. “ opinions of ghosts, ignorance of second causes, devotion to what men fear, and taking of things casual for prognostics.”† He takes pains in many of his works to prove man to be a necessary agent, and expressly asserts the materiality and mortality of the human soul ; and he represents the doctrine concerning the distinction between soul and body in man to be an error contracted by the contagion of the demonology of the Greeks. We may observe by the way the great difference there is in this respect between Mr. Hobbes and Lord Herbert. This noble writer has reckoned the notion and belief of a future state among the common notions naturally obvious to the minds of all men : but the account Mr. Hobbes is pleased to give of it is this, that the belief of a future state after death “ is a belief grounded upon other men’s saying, that they knew it supernaturally, or that they knew those, that knew them, that knew others, that knew it supernaturally.”‡

That we may have the better notion of this extraordinary writer, it may not be amiss to mention some other of his maxims. He asserts, that by the law of nature every man hath a right to all things, and over all persons, and that the natural condition of man is a state of war, a war of all men against all men : that there is no way so reasonable for any man as to anticipate, that is, by force and wiles to master all the persons of others that he can, so long till he sees no other power great enough to endanger him : that the civil laws are the only rules of good and evil, just and unjust, honest and dishonest ; and that antecedently to such laws every action is in its own nature indifferent : that there is nothing good or evil in itself, nor any common laws constituting what is naturally just and unjust ; that all things are measured by what every man judgeth fit, where there is no civil government, and by the laws of society where there

* Leviath. p. 214, 371.

† Ibid. p. 53.

‡ Ibid. p. 74.

is one :* that the power of the sovereign is absolute, and that he is not bound by any compacts with his subjects : that nothing the sovereign can do to the subject can properly be called injurious or wrong ; and that the king's word is sufficient to take any thing from any subject, if there be need, and the king is the judge of that need.†

In Mr. Hobbes we have a remarkable instance what strange extravagances men of wit and genius may fall into, who, whilst they value themselves upon their superior penetration, and laugh at popular errors and superstition, often give in to notions so wild and ridiculous, as none of the people that govern themselves by plain common sense could be guilty of. It will hardly be thought too severe a censure to say, that Mr. Hobbes's scheme strikes at the foundation of all religion, both natural and revealed : that it tendeth not only to subvert the authority of the Scripture, but to destroy God's moral administration : that it confoundeth the natural differences of good and evil, virtue and vice, and taketh away the distinction between soul and body, and the liberty of human actions : that it destroyeth the best principles of the human nature, and, instead of that innate benevolence and social disposition which should unite men together, supposeth all men to be naturally in a state of war with one another : that it erecteth an absolute tyranny in the state and church, which it confounds, and maketh the will of the prince or governing power, the sole standard of right and wrong ; and that it destroyeth all the rights of private conscience, and, indeed, leaveth no room for conscience at all.

But notwithstanding the ill tendency of many of Mr. Hobbes's principles, yet the agreeableness of his style, of which he was a great master, joined to his dogmatical way of pronouncing with a very decisive air, and the very oddness and apparent novelty of his notions, gave them a great run for a time, and did no small mischief. He himself boasted of the good reception his *Leviathan* met with among many of our gentry : but the manifold absurdities and inconsistencies of his scheme, and the pernicious consequences of it to religion, morality, and the civil government, have been so well exposed, and set in so clear a light, that there are not many of our modern deists that would be thought openly to espouse his system in its full extent : though indeed it cannot be denied, that there are not a few things in their writings borrowed from his, and that some of them have chosen rather to follow him than Lord Herbert in several of his principles, and particularly in asserting the materiality and mortality of the human soul, and denying man's free agency.

Mr. Hobbes met with many learned adversaries, among whom we may particularly reckon Dr. Seth Ward, afterwards bishop of Salisbury, and archbishop Bramhal. The latter argued with great

* De Cive, c. vi. s. 18. c. x. s. 1. c. 12. s. i. *Leviath.* p. 24, 25, 60, 61, 62, 63, 72.

† *Leviath.* p. 90, 106.

acuteness against that part of the scheme which relates to liberty and necessity, and afterwards attacked the whole of his system, in a piece called the *Catching of the Leviathan*, published at London in 1658; in which he undertakes to demonstrate, out of Mr. Hobbes's own works, that no man who is thoroughly an *Hobbist* can be "a good Christian, or a good commonwealth's man, or reconcile himself to himself." The reverend Mr. Tenison, afterwards archbishop of Canterbury, gave a summary view of Mr. Hobbes's principles, with a judicious confutation of them, in a book called *The Creed of Mr. Hobbes examined*, published in 1670. To these may be added, the famous Earl of Clarendon, who wrote *A brief View and Survey of the dangerous and pernicious Errors to the Church and State in Mr. Hobbes's Book entitled "Leviathan."* This was published in 1676. Bishop Parker, Mr. Tyrrel, but, above all, Bishop Cumberland, in his justly celebrated work *de Legibus Naturæ*, did also distinguish themselves in this controversy. It is to be observed, that the learned writers who opposed Mr. Hobbes did not so much apply themselves to vindicate revealed religion, or the Christian system, as to establish the great principles of all religion and morality, which his scheme tended to subvert: and to show, that they had a real foundation in reason and nature. In this they certainly did good service to religion: yet some of the enemies of revelation endeavoured to take advantage of it, as if this showed that there is no other religion but the law of nature, and that any extraordinary revelation is needless and useless. Thus, on every supposition, these gentlemen seem resolved to carry their cause against Christianity. If there be no law of nature, no real difference, in the nature of things, between moral good and evil, virtue and vice, there is no such thing as religion at all, and consequently no Christian religion. On the other hand, if it be proved that there is such a thing as the religion and law of nature, which is founded in the very nature and relations of things, and agreeable to right reason, then it is concluded, that this alone is sufficient, and that it is clear and obvious to all mankind, and therefore they need no revelation to instruct them in it, or assure them of it. A very wrong conclusion this! since it is manifest that a well attested revelation from God would be of very great use, both farther to clear and confirm some of the important principles of natural religion, which, though in themselves reasonable, were in fact greatly obscured and perverted in the corrupt state of mankind; and also to instruct men in things which, however highly useful to be known, they could not have clearly discovered or been fully assured of, by the mere unassisted light of nature, without a divine revelation.

This might lead one into a train of reflections on the connection there is between natural and revealed religion: but I must content myself with giving short hints of things: to enlarge farther upon them would not suit my present design. You will probably hear from me again soon: and in the mean time, I am, &c.

LETTER IV.

Mr. Charles Blount's Notes on the Life of Apollonius Tyanæus, designed to expose Christianity.—His *Religio Laici* copied, for the most part, from Lord Herbert.—He had a chief hand in the *Oracles of Reason*.—He attacks the Doctrine of a Mediator, as unworthy of God.—His remarkable Concession, that it is not safe to trust to Deism alone, without Christianity joined with it.—Mr. Toland, another deistical Writer; very fond of asserting Paradoxes.—The Design of his *Amyntor* to render the Canon of the New Testament uncertain.—He gives a large Catalogue of spurious Gospels, and attempts to show that they were equally received and acknowledged in the primitive Times, with the Gospels which are now looked upon as authentic.—The contrary fully proved in the Answers that were made to him.

SIR,

AMONG those who openly avowed the cause of Deism, and seemed zealous to promote it, may be reckoned Charles Blount, Esq. In 1680 he published a translation of the two first books of Philostratus's Life of Apollonius Tyanæus, with large notes, which are manifestly intended to strike at revealed religion. Apollonius, you know, was a Pythagorean philosopher that lived in the first century, whose character and miracles were opposed by the pagans to those of our Lord Jesus Christ. Hierocles wrote a book to this purpose, which was answered by Eusebius, who hath plainly proved, that Philostratus was a vain and fabulous writer, and that his accounts are full of romantic stories and ridiculous fables: and whoever impartially considers Philostratus's book, which is still extant, must be convinced that Eusebius's censure upon it is just. Nothing can be supposed more different than Philostratus's manner of writing, stuffed with rhetorical flourishes and vain ostentations of learning, is from the plain, sober, artless narration of the evangelists, which hath all the characters of genuine unaffected simplicity, and a sincere regard to truth: to which it may be added, that Apollonius's philosophy, and the wonders he is said to have wrought, all tended to uphold the reigning established superstition and idolatry, which at the same time had all worldly advantages on its side, and yet was not able to oppose the progress of Christianity, which triumphed over it, though destitute of all those advantages, and though it had all the powers of the world against it:—a manifest proof this, how vastly superior the evidence of our Saviour's divine character and miracles was to any thing that could be produced in opposition to it! And yet many of our modern deists have been fond of running the parallel between Apollonius and Jesus Christ. Mr. Blount, in his notes, has thrown out several insinuations against the miracles of our Saviour, in which he has been followed and even exceeded by some succeeding writers, of whom I may afterwards give some account.

This gentleman has on several occasions discovered a strong prejudice against the Scriptures, and shown how willing he is to lay hold on whatsoever he thinks may expose them: it could be only owing to this, that he finds fault with that manner of expression, *he opened his mouth, and said:** a censure which may be thought to proceed from an extraordinary nicety, rather than a true justness of taste. But though this, and other oriental idioms and forms of speech, may differ from what is usual among us, the language of Scripture has been always admired by the best judges.

In 1683 the same gentleman published a small book intitled *Religio Laici*, which is little more than a translation of Lord Herbert's treatise of the same name. The additions and improvements he has made are so few, and of such small moment, as not to deserve a distinct consideration, and therefore I shall refer to the reflections already made on Lord Herbert's scheme.

Some years after, in 1693, there was another book published, in which Mr. Blount had a principal concern, and which was plainly intended to propagate infidelity. It had a pompous title, *The Oracles of Reason*, and was published after Mr. Blount's unhappy end, by his friend Mr. Charles Gildon, who ushered it into the world by a preface in defence of self-murder, which that gentleman had been guilty of, to get rid of the uneasiness of a passion which proved too violent for him. The title of the book seemed to promise demonstration, as if it were intended to serve as an infallible guide in matters of religion: but there is little order or method in it, or regularity of design. It is a collection of different pieces, consisting for the most part of letters between Mr. Blount and his friends, intermixed with fragments and translations from some Greek and Latin authors, done with no great exactness.

That part of the book which relates to natural religion and its sufficiency, proceeds chiefly upon Lord Herbert's plan. There are two of the tracts particularly remarkable this way: the one is *A Summary Account of the Deist's Religion*, by Mr. Blount: the other is a letter from A. W. to Mr. Blount, concerning natural religion, as opposed to divine revelation. In the former of these, Mr. Blount, having set himself to show that God is not to be worshipped by an image or by sacrifices, next endeavoureth to prove that he is not to be worshipped by a mediator. He pretends that the worship of God by a mediator derogateth from his infinite mercy, equally as an image doth from his spirituality and infinity.

But his argument is founded upon a misapprehension or misrepresentation of the gospel scheme. Far from derogating from the mercy or goodness of God, the appointment of such a mediator as the gospel proposeth is one of the most signal instances of his grace and goodness towards mankind: it is a wise and gracious provision for exercising his mercy towards guilty creatures, in such a way as is most becoming his own glorious government and perfections, and

* Blount's Notes on Philostratus, p. 69.

most conducive to their peace and comfort, and most proper to remove their guilty jealousies and fears.

But he farther urgeth, that if God appointed the mediator, this shows that he was really reconciled to the world before, and consequently that there was no need of a mediator. It sheweth, indeed, that God had kind thoughts of mercy, and gracious intentions towards the human race; but this doth not prove that therefore the appointment of a mediator was needless. On the contrary, his wisdom determined him to take this method as the properest way of exercising his mercy, and dispensing the effects of his goodness; of which he is certainly the fittest judge: and whosoever duly considers the sublime idea given us in the gospel of the mediator, the work upon which he was sent, and the offices he was invested with, may observe such characters of the divine wisdom and goodness in it, such a regard to the honour of God, and to the comfort, and benefit, and happiness of mankind, as ought greatly to recommend the gospel scheme. But the distinct consideration of these things would take up more room than the present design will allow.

To this tract is prefixed a letter from Mr. Blount to Dr. Sydenham, in which there is this remarkable passage: that "undoubtedly, in our travels to the other world, the common road is the safest; and though Deism is a good manuring of a man's conscience, yet certainly, if sowed with Christianity, it will produce the most plentiful crop." Here he seems plainly to own, that it is not safe to trust to Deism alone, if Christianity be not joined with it*.

As to the other tract I mentioned, the letter written by A. W. to Mr. Blount, concerning natural religion as opposed to divine revelation, the chief heads of natural religion are there reduced to seven articles. 1. That there is an infinite and eternal God, creator of all things. 2. That he governs the world by his providence. 3. That it is our duty to worship and obey him as our creator and governor. 4. That our worship consists in prayer to him, and praise of him. 5. That our obedience consists in the rules of right reason, the practice of which is moral virtue. 6. That we are to expect rewards and punishments hereafter according to our actions in this life, which includes the soul's immortality, and is proved by our admitting providence. 7. That when we err from the rules of our duty, we ought to repent, and trust in God's mercy for pardon†. Here Lord Herbert's five articles, which were all that he accounted necessary, are enlarged to seven, which indeed may be regarded as farther explications of the former: and with other explications they might be enlarged to a still greater number. What was observed concerning Lord Herbert's articles may be applied to these. It will be acknowledged, that they are agreeable to right reason; but this is no proof that therefore an express divine revelation would not be needful, in the present state of mankind, to set them in a stronger light, and give them additional force. Several of the deists would be far

Oracles of Reason, p. 87. 91.

† Ibid. p. 197.

from agreeing with this writer in some of the articles he mentions. The first article runs thus, that *there is one eternal self-existent God, creator of all things*; where it is plainly supposed, that the world was created; and yet, in another part of that book, Mr. Blount has taken the pains to translate a large fragment of Ocellus Lucanus, which is designed to prove the eternity of the world: * and it appears that he himself does not disapprove it. In another part of these pretended *Oracles*, in a letter from Mr. Gildon to Mr. Blount, the opinion of the origin of good and evil, from two different eternal principles, the one good, the other evil, is represented as not unreasonable. † In another of the above-mentioned seven articles it is declared, that the *worship we owe to God consists in prayer to Him, and praise of Him*: and yet it is well known, that this has been contested and denied by some of the ancient philosophers and modern deists; and Mr. Blount himself, in his notes upon the life of Apollonius Tyanæus, having observed that some of the heathens used no prayers at all, insinuates, in their names, objections against that duty. ‡ With regard to the fifth article, that *our obedience consists in the rules of right reason, the practice whereof is moral virtue*, this is easily said in general; but there is no great likelihood, that, if they were to come to a particular explication, they would agree what is to be looked upon as included in the rules of right reason, and in the practice of moral virtue. Some of them would probably think it reasonable to indulge the appetites and passions in instances which others would not think reasonable or proper: even in a point of such consequence as self-murder, some of the ancient philosophers and modern deists have pleaded for it, whilst others have condemned it; and it is openly justified (as was before observed) in the preface to these *Oracles of Reason*. One should therefore think no reasonable man could deny, that express precepts, determining by a divine authority the particulars of moral duty, would be of great advantage. As to the article of future rewards and punishments, and the soul's immortality, this is represented by Mr. Blount, in a letter to the right honourable the most ingenious Strephon, and by A. W. in his letter to Mr. Blount, as a necessary part of natural religion; and yet he observes, that the ancient heathens disagreed about it. § In another part of these *Oracles*, it is declared to be probable, that the soul of man is not of an entirely distinct nature from the body, but only a purer material composition. || Now the soul's materiality is not very consistent with the doctrine of its immortality: and from this we may judge of A. W.'s argument against Christianity, that "if the reasons of the Christian religion were evident, there would be no longer any contention or difference about it: and if all do not agree in it, those marks of truth in "it are not visible, which are necessary to draw our assent." ¶ This argument, if it were good for any thing, would prove that there are

* *Oracles of Reason*, p. 212—223. † *Ibid.* p. 194. ‡ *Notes on Philostratus*, p. 38.
§ *Oracles of Reason*, p. 201. || *Ibid.* p. 154, 187. ¶ *Ibid.* p. 201, 206.

no visible marks of truth in natural religion, no more than in revealed; since it cannot be denied that men differ about the one as well as the other: but the truth is, the argument doth not conclude in either case.

There are several things in the *Oracles of Reason* which are particularly designed against the holy Scriptures, and which have been repeated by others since: but the sacred writings have been fully vindicated against those exceptions. Mr. Blount has particularly attacked the writings of Moses, and the most considerable part of what he has offered to this purpose is borrowed either from the learned author of the *Archæologia-Philosophica*; who, though he differed in some things from what is generally looked upon as the true interpretation of Moses's sense, was far from intending to subvert the authority of the Mosaic writings; or from the author of the hypothesis of the *Pre-Adamites*, who afterwards retracted his own book. From this writer Mr. Blount hath given us a literal translation for several pages together, in different parts of this book, without making the least acknowledgment of it, or taking any notice of the answers that had been returned. In like manner he hath thought proper to repeat the objections which have been frequently urged against the Mosaic writings, from the irreconcilableness of the accounts there given with the antiquities pretended to by the most learned heathen nations, particularly the Chaldeans and Egyptians. Our great Stillingfleet had, in the first book of his *Origines Sacrae*, very amply considered that matter, and clearly shown the vanity of those pretences; yet they are here again advanced with as much confidence as if they had never been refuted. The same observation may be made with regard to the arguments of Ocellus Lucanus about the eternity of the world, which are translated and produced with great pomp by Mr. Blount, though they had been unanswerably exposed in the last-mentioned learned treatise*.

The *Oracles of Reason* were animadverted upon by Mr. John Bradley, in a book published at London in 1699, in 12mo. intitled, *An Impartial View of the Truth of Christianity, with the History of the Life and Miracles of Apollonius T'yanæus: to which are added, some Reflections on a Book called "Oracles of Reason."* This book I have not seen. Dr. Nichols's *Conference with a Theist* was also particularly designed by the learned and ingenious author in opposition to the *Oracles of Reason*; and he hath not left any material part of that book unanswered. The first part of this *Conference* was published at London in 12mo. in 1696, and the other three parts in the following years. But what deserveth our special notice, Mr. Gildon, the publisher of the *Oracles of Reason*, and who had recommended them to the world with a pompous eulogium, was afterwards, upon mature consideration, convinced of his error; of which he gave a remarkable proof, in a good book which he pub-

* *Origines Sacrae*, book iii. c. 2. f. 4, 5, 6, 7.

lished some years after, in 1705, intitled *The Deist's Manual*. It is observable, that the greatest part of this book is taken up in vindicating the doctrines of the existence and attributes of God, his providence and government of the world, the immortality of the soul, and a future state: and his reason for it was, as he himself intimates, because many of the deists, with whom he was well acquainted, did really deny those great principles which lie at the foundation of all religion, or at least represented them as doubtful and uncertain; and their not admitting natural religion in its just extent formed some of their principal prejudices against the Christian revelation.

The next writer of whom I shall give some account is Mr. Toland, who, though he called himself a Christian, made it very much the business of his life to serve the cause of infidelity, and to unsettle men's minds with regard to religion. There are many things in his writings which show, that he was very fond of asserting things that had an appearance of novelty, however destitute of reason or probability; a remarkable instance of which he has given in his strange attempt to prove that motion is essential to matter. See his letters to *Serena*, Letter III.* In another book, which he calls *Pantheisticon*, published in 1720, he has shown himself a favourer and admirer of the *Pantheistic* philosophy, *i. e.* that of Spinoza, which acknowledgeth no other God but the universe. The first thing that made Mr. Toland taken notice of, was his *Christianity not mysterious; or, a Discourse showing, that there is Nothing in the Gospel contrary to Reason, nor above it, and that no Christian Doctrine can be properly called a mystery*. This was published in 1696, and was animadverted upon by several writers of learning and reputation, as Mr. Beconsal, Mr. Beverly, Mr. John Norris, Dr. Payne, Mr. Synge, afterwards archbishop of Tuam, and Mr. Brown, afterwards bishop of Cork. In 1709 he published at the Hague two Latin dissertations. The first is intitled, *Adeisidæmon, sive Titus Livius a superstitione vindicatus. In qua dissertatione probatur Livium historicum in sacris, prodigiis, et ostentis enarrandis, haudquaquam fuisse credulum aut superstitiosum: ipsamque superstitionem non minus Reipublicæ (si non magis) exitiosam esse, quam purum putum atheismum*. The second dissertation bears the title of *Origines Judaicæ, sive Strabonis de Mose et religione Judaica historia breviter illustrata*. In this dissertation he seems to prefer the account of this pagan author concerning Moses and the Jewish religion, before that which was given by the Jews themselves. These two dissertations were answered by Mr. la Faye, minister at Utrecht, in a book printed in 1709, and intitled, *Defensio religionis, nec non Mosis et gentis Judaicæ, contra duas dissertationes Joannis Tolandi*; and by Mr. Benoit, minister at Delft, in his *Mélange de remarques critiques, historiques, philosophiques, théologiques, sur les deux dissertations de Mr. Toland, intitulées, l'un l'Homme sans superstition, et l'autre les origines Judaïques*, printed at Delft in 1712.

* This is confuted in Dr. Clarke's *Demonstration*, &c. p. 24. Edit. 7th.

But what I shall here particularly take notice of, and by which he hath chiefly distinguished himself, is the pains he hath taken to invalidate the authority of the sacred Canon of the New Testament, and to render it uncertain and precarious. This seems to have been the design of the book he calls *Amyntor*, which he published in 1698, and in which he hath given a catalogue of books, attributed in the primitive times to Jesus Christ, his apostles, and other eminent persons, "together with remarks and observations relating to the Canon of Scripture." He hath there raked together whatever he could find relating to the spurious gospels and pretended sacred books, which appeared in the early ages of the Christian church. These he hath produced with great pomp, to the number of eighty and upwards; and though they were most of them evidently false and ridiculous, and carried the plainest marks of forgery and imposture, of which, no doubt, he was very sensible, yet he has done what he could to represent them as of equal authority with the four gospels and other sacred books of the New Testament, now received among Christians. To this end he has taken advantage of the unwary and ill-grounded hypotheses of some learned men, and has endeavoured to prove, that the books of the present Canon lay concealed in the coffers of private persons till the latter times of Trajan or Adrian, and were not known to the clergy or churches of those times, nor distinguished from the spurious works of heretics; and that the Scriptures which we now receive as canonical, and others which we now reject, were indifferently and promiscuously cited and appealed to by the most ancient Christian writers. His design in all this manifestly is to show, that the gospels, and other sacred writings of the New Testament, now acknowledged as canonical, really deserve no greater credit, and are no more to be depended upon, than those books which are rejected and exploded as forgeries; and yet he had the confidence to pretend, in a book he afterwards published, that his intention in his *Amyntor* was not to invalidate, but to illustrate and confirm, the Canon of the New Testament.* This may serve as one instance, among the many that might be produced, of the writer's sincerity.

Several good answers were returned to Toland's *Amyntor*. Mr. (afterwards) Dr. Samuel Clarke published a small tract in 1699, intitled, *Some Reflections on that part of the Book called "Amyntor," which relates to the Writings of the primitive Fathers, and the Canon of the New Testament*. In this he gave an early specimen of those talents which he afterwards employed to so great advantage in the defence of Christianity. The same book was afterwards answered by the ingenious Mr. Stephen Nye, in his *Historical Account and Defence of the Canon of the New Testament, in Answer*

* See Toland's preface to his *Nazarenus*, p. 9. This very odd book was well answered by Mr. (afterwards) Dr. Mangey, in his *Remarks upon Nazarenus*; on which Mr. Toland made some reflections, in a Tract he called *Mangoneutes*. Mr. Paterson also published his *Anti Nazarenus*, in answer to Mr. Toland's book. And Dr. Thomas Brett took some notice of it in the Preface to his *Tradition necessary to explain and interpret the Holy Scriptures*.

to "*Amyntor*"; and by Mr. Richardson, in his *Canon of the New Testament Vindicated*, whose work hath been justly and generally esteemed, as executed with great learning and judgment. To these may be added, Mr. Jones, who hath considered this matter distinctly, and at large, in his *New and Full Method of settling the Canonical Authority of the New Testament*, which was published at London in 1726, in two volumes 8vo.; to which a third small one was afterwards added, published in 1727, but left unfinished by reason of the author's death.

These learned writers have plainly shown Mr. Toland's great unfairness and disingenuity in his whole management of the argument: That he has frequently imposed upon his readers by false quotations, or by grossly misrepresenting the authors he cites: That he has been guilty of great blunders and ridiculous mistakes: That several of the writings he produces, as having been written in the apostolic age, were forged so late as the third or fourth century: That by far the greatest part of those writings, of which he hath given so pompous a catalogue, and which he would put upon the world as most ancient and apostolical, are expressly rejected by the authors whom he himself refers to, as spurious and apocryphal, or even as absurd and impious forgeries: That as to those few of them which are not expressly rejected and condemned by the writers who have mentioned them, it doth not appear by any one testimony, that they were ever generally received and acknowledged in the Christian church, or equalled with the books of the sacred Canon: and that even those authors who have been thought to quote some of them with approbation, yet expressly declare, that none but the four gospels were received in the Christian church, as of divine authority: That though some of the false gospels, that they might the better pass upon the people, were compiled out of the genuine gospels, with such additions, omissions, and interpolations, as might best answer the design of the compilers, this did not hinder their being generally rejected; whereas the four gospels, the same which we now receive, were generally acknowledged from the beginning: That these and other sacred books of the New Testament were, even in the earliest ages, spread into distant countries, and were in the possession of great numbers of persons, and read in the churches as divine: And finally, that several of the genuine writers of the three first centuries have left us catalogues of the sacred books of the New Testament, but in none of these catalogues do any of the apocryphal books appear.

To set this whole matter in a clearer light, Mr. Jones has given us a complete enumeration of all the apocryphal books of the New Testament, and made a critical inquiry into each of these books, with an English version of those of them which are now extant, and a particular proof that none of them were ever admitted into the Canon; and he hath distinctly produced and considered every testimony relating to them that is to be found in any Christian writer or writers of the first four centuries after Christ.

Upon all that hath been written on this subject, it is a just and natural reflection, that as the number of spurious gospels which were rejected by the primitive Christians shows, how scrupulous they were not to admit any books as canonical; but those of whose truth and authenticity they had sufficient proofs; so their admitting and receiving with so general a consent, the four gospels which are now in our hands, affordeth a strong argument, that they had undoubted evidence of the genuine truth and certainty of the evangelical records, which fully satisfied them who lived nearest those times, and who had the best opportunities of knowing; and that to this it was owing, that these, and no others, were generally received and acknowledged as of divine authority.

On this occasion it is proper to mention Dr. Lardner's excellent work of the *Credibility of the Gospel History*; in the second part of which, consisting of several volumes, he hath made a full and accurate collection of the passages which are to be found in the writers of the first ages of the Christian church, relating to the four gospels, and other sacred books of the New Testament. This he hath executed with so much fidelity and diligence, and with such exactness of judgment, that the English reader, who hath not opportunity to consult the originals, will be able to judge for himself, upon considering the passages of the original authors, which are very faithfully translated. This affordeth so clear and continued a proof of their having been generally received in the earliest ages of the Christian church, that one would hope it should put an end to this part of the controversy.

LETTER V.

The Earl of Shaftesbury, a fine and much admired Writer.—Not very consistent in the Account he gives of Christianity.—He casteth Reflections on the Doctrine of future Rewards and Punishments, as if it were of Disservice to the Interests of Virtue.—The contrary shown from his own Acknowledgments.—His Lordship resolves the credit of holy Writ wholly into the Authority and Appointment of the State.—He frequently takes Occasion to expose the Scriptures, and represents them as uncertain, and not to be depended upon.—What he saith concerning Ridicule, as the Test and Criterion of Truth, examined.—It is shown, that a turn to Ridicule is not the properest Disposition for finding out Truth; and that there is great danger of its being misapplied.—His Lordship's own Writings furnish Instances of such a wrong Application.—Authors mentioned that have written against him.

SIR,

It gives me a real concern, that, among the writers who have appeared against revealed religion, I am obliged to take notice of the noble author of the *Characteristics*. Some indeed are not willing to allow that he is to be reckoned in this number. Passages

are produced out of some of his writings, in which he expresseth very favourable sentiments of Christianity. This he doth particularly in a preface, which, and I believe justly, is ascribed to his Lordship as the author, prefixed to a volume of select sermons of Dr. Benjamin Whichcot, published in 1698. In that preface he finds fault with those in this profane age that represent not only the institution of preaching, but even the gospel itself, and our holy religion, to be a fraud. He expresseth his hope, that from some things in these sermons, even they that are prejudiced against Christianity may be induced to like it the better; and that the vein of goodness which appears throughout these discourses will make such as are already Christians prize Christianity the more; and the fairness, ingenuity, and impartiality, which they learn from hence, will be a security to them against the contrary temper of those other irreconcilable enemies to our holy faith. In 1716 some of his letters were published at London, under the title of *Several Letters written by a noble Lord to a Young Man in the University*, 8vo. In these letters, which were written a few years before the Earl of Shaftesbury's death, in the years 1707, 1708, 1709, there are excellent sentiments and advices, and some which seem to discover a real regard for the Christian religion.

It were greatly to be wished, on many accounts, that his Lordship had always expressed himself in an uniform manner on this subject. No impartial man will deny him the praise of a fine genius. The quality of the writer, his lively and beautiful imagination, the delicacy of taste he hath shown in many instances, and the graces and embellishments of his style, though perhaps sometimes too affected, have procured him many admirers. To which may be added, his refined sentiments on the beauty and excellence of virtue, and that he hath often spoken honourably of a wise and good providence, which ministers and governs the whole in the best manner; and hath strongly asserted, in opposition to Mr. Hobbes, the natural differences between good and evil; and that man was originally formed for society, and the exercise of mutual kindness and benevolence; and not only so, but for religion and piety too.* These things have very much prejudiced many persons in his favour, and prepared them for receiving, almost implicitly, whatever he hath advanced. And yet it cannot be denied, that there are many things in his books, which seem to be evidently calculated to cast contempt upon Christianity and the holy Scriptures.

It is in the *Characteristics* that we are properly to look for an account of his Lordship's sentiments. They were first published in three vols. 8vo. in 1711; and the last part of his life was employed in revising them, and preparing for a new and most correct edition of them, which accordingly was published immediately after his death. In them he completed the whole of his works which he intended should be made public: and these books are so generally

* *Characteristics*, vol. iii. p. 224.

read, and by many so much admired, that it is necessary to take notice of those things in them which seem to have a bad aspect on religion, and to be of a dangerous influence and tendency.

Of this kind are the frequent reflections he hath cast on the doctrine of future rewards and punishments. This, as I observed in a former letter, is represented by Lord Herbert as a fundamental article of natural religion; and though he carries it too far, in making it an innate principle, in which all mankind are, and have been always agreed; yet it cannot be denied, that there were some notices and traces of it generally spread among the nations, though mixed with much obscurity, and which probably had a great effect in preserving the remains of religion and virtue among the people, though contradicted by several sects of their philosophers. It is the great advantage and glory of Christianity, that it hath cleared and confirmed this important principle, and hath brought life and immortality into an open light. But the author of the *Characteristics* frequently expresseth himself in a manner, which tendeth to raise a prejudice against this great principle of natural and revealed religion, as if it were of little use in morals, yea, and in many cases of a bad tendency. Thus, after having made an elegant representation of the happy state of things in the heathen world, and the liberty and harmony which then prevailed, he proceeds to show the different state of things among Christians, which he seems chiefly to attribute to the notion and belief of a future state. "A new sort of policy (saith he) which extends itself to another world, and considers the future lives and happiness of men rather than the present, has made us leap beyond the bounds of natural humanity; and, out of a supernatural charity, has taught us the way of plaguing one another most heartily. It has raised an antipathy which no temporal interest could ever do, and intailed upon us a mutual hatred to all eternity. The *saving of souls* is now the heroic passion of exalted spirits."* This is not the only place where his Lordship speaks with ridicule of the *saving of souls*, and of those *who act for their souls' sakes*, and *make a careful provision for hereafter*.† And he elsewhere tells us, speaking of the expectation of God's dispensing rewards and punishments in a future life, that "an expectation and dependency so miraculous and extraordinary as this is, must naturally take off from other inferior dependencies and encouragements. Where infinite rewards are thus enforced, and the imagination strongly turned towards them, the other common and natural motives to goodness are apt to be neglected, and lose much by disuse. Other interests are hardly so much as computed, whilst the mind is thus transported in the pursuit of a high advantage, and self-interest, so narrowly confined within ourselves. On this account, all other affections to our friends, relations, or mankind, are often slightly regarded, as being worldly, and of little moment in respect of the interest of our souls.‡" To the same purpose he

* *Characteristics*, vol. I. p. 18, 19. edit. 5th.

† *Ibid.* vol. iii. p. 302.

‡ *Ibid.* vol. ii. p. 68

represents it, as if the Christian were so urged to have his *conversation in heaven*, as not to be obliged to *enter into any engagements with this lower world*, or to concern himself either with the businesses of life, or with the offices of *private friendship*, or the service of the public: and that these are to be regarded as *embarrassments to him in working out his own salvation*.* It seems to be a natural inference from all this, that, according to his representation of the matter, it were better for mankind not to believe, or have any regard to a future state at all; for if the belief be weak, he tells us it will be of the worst consequence. "There can (says he) in some respects be nothing more fatal to virtue than the weak and uncertain belief of future rewards and punishments: for the stress being wholly laid on this foundation, if this foundation seem to fail, there is no farther prop or security to men's virtue.†" And, on the other hand, if the belief be strong, and deeply impressed on the mind, it will cause men to neglect the interests and duties of this present life, the duties they owe to their friends, their neighbours, and their country. This is the account his Lordship gives of it; but it is grossly misrepresented: for since that virtue and goodness which is to be rewarded hereafter includes, according to the scripture account of it, the doing good here on earth as far as we have an opportunity, and even a diligence in the business of our several callings, and the exercise of social duties, it is evidently wrong to say, that a regard to the recompenses of a future state must carry us off from those duties, when, on the contrary, it bindeth us more strongly to the performance of them. Our having our conversation in heaven is not designed to cause us to neglect the duties incumbent upon us here on earth; for these are most expressly enjoined in the gospel-law, as being comprehended in that righteousness which intitleth us to that future glory; but that we should not take up with the inferior things of this present world as our proper ultimate portion and happiness, but raise our views to a nobler state, where we hope to arrive to the true felicity and perfection of our natures. And this certainly is an admirable lesson, highly to the honour of Christianity; since it is a too great affection and esteem for worldly enjoyments that puts men upon wrong pursuits, and is the principal source of the greatest disorders of human life.

Several other passages might be produced, in which his Lordship seems to represent the belief and expectation of a future state as of pernicious influence. Thus he observes, "that the principle of self-love, which is naturally so prevailing in us, is improved and made stronger every day by the exercise of the passions on a subject of more extended interest;" (by which he refers to the expectation of eternal happiness in a future state) "and that there may be reason to apprehend, that a temper of this kind will extend itself through all the parts of life. And this has a tendency to create a stricter attention to self-good and private interest, and must insen-

* Characteristics, vol. 1. p. 99, 100.

† Ibid. vol. ii. p. 69.

sibly diminish the affection towards public good, or the interest of society, and introduce a certain narrowness of spirit, which is observable in devout persons of almost all religions and persuasions."* Here he lays a heavy charge on the hope of future happiness; as if it had a bad tendency, to spread an inordinate criminal selfishness through the whole of human life, to diminish the public good affections, and introduce a narrowness of spirit. A most unjust charge this! Since it might easily be shown, that the belief and hope of such an happiness as the gospel sets before us, and which is there represented as a state of perfect goodness and the most extended benevolence, and for which that *charity* which *seeketh not her own* is one of the best preparatives, has a tendency, if rightly understood, to enlarge the heart, to purify and ennoble the soul, and raise it above the little narrow interests of the fleshly self, and to fill it with the highest idea of God, and his immense goodness.

But his Lordship urges, that "those who talk of the rewards of virtue make it so very mercenary a thing, and have talked so much of its rewards, that one can hardly tell what there is in it after all that is worth rewarding.† He observes that the most *heroic virtue*, *private friendship*, and *zeal for the public*,‡ have little notice taken

* Characteristics, vol. ii. p. 58.

† Ibid. vol. i. p. 97.

‡ It has been noted by the deistical writers, that zeal for the public, or love to a man's country, which was so much inculcated by some of the ancient philosophers and moralists, is passed over in the gospel; and this is mentioned as a defect in the Christian morality. But if the matter be rightly considered, there is no just foundation for this objection. To have recommended as by a divine authority, what the Romans generally understood by love to their country, a strong passion for the glory of it, and which often carried them to do great injustice to those of other nations, would not have been suited to the nature of a revelation, which was designed for the general good of mankind, and to promote universal benevolence. And if our Saviour had exhorted the Jews in the name of God to a zeal for their country and its liberties, this, in the disposition they were then in, could have been looked upon in no other light, than as stirring them up to tumults and insurrections. But of love to our country, as it signifies a true and affectionate concern for the public good, he gave an admirable example; and his example hath the force of a precept, according to the Christian system. This will be evident to any one that impartially considers the affection he showed to the Jewish nation, from whom he sprung according to the flesh; the amiable concern he expressed for the miseries he foresaw were coming upon them, and the endeavours he used to prevent those evils, by checking the tumultuous spirit which was then working among them, and engaging them to a peaceable subjection to the Roman government. The same observation may be made with regard to the apostles and first publishers of Christianity after our Saviour's resurrection. If they had in the name of God urged it upon the Jews and Gentiles, among whom they preached the gospel, to be zealous for their country, and had promised divine rewards to so heroic a virtue, this would undoubtedly have been regarded as an attempt to raise disturbances in the state. It could not, as things were circumstanced, have produced any good effects, and might probably have had very bad ones. But if by zeal for the public be meant a hearty desire and endeavour to promote the public good, and the real welfare of the community, nothing can be better fitted to answer that end than the Christian law. It hath a manifest tendency, wherever it is sincerely believed and embraced, to make good magistrates, and faithful and peaceable subjects, and to render men truly useful to the public, by engaging them to a diligent discharge of the duties of their several stations and relations, and to the practice of universal righteousness. Christianity, which requires us to exert so noble a spirit of disinterested benevolence, as to be ready to lay down our lives for the brethren, 1 John iii. 16, would certainly engage and animate us, if properly called to it, even to lay down our lives for the good of the community. A virtuous regard to the public happiness, and a contributing as far as in us lies to pro-

of them in our *holy religion*, nor have any reward promised them: though if they be comprehended in the things that are *lovely*, and *virtuous*, and *praiseworthy*, they are both commanded there, and shall according to the gospel scheme be rewarded; but his Lordship who supposes the contrary, mentions it as an advantage, that no premium or penalty being enforced in these cases, it leaves *more room for disinterestedness*, the virtue is a *free choice*, and *the magnanimity is left entire*.^{*} And does not this insinuate, that if no reward had been promised at all, to any part of our duty, it would have been the better for us, and our virtues would have been the more excellent? In like manner he represents that resignation to God, which depends upon the hope of infinite retributions or rewards, to be a *false resignation*, which *discovers no worth nor virtue*; since it is only a man's resigning his present life and pleasure conditionally, for that which he himself owns to be beyond an equivalent.[†]

And yet this right honourable author himself acknowledgeth, that if by the hope of reward be understood the hope and desire of virtuous enjoyments, or of the very practice and exercise of virtue in another life, it is far from being derogatory to virtue, but is rather an evidence of our loving it.[‡] And nothing is more evident to any one that is acquainted with the holy Scriptures, than that though the future happiness is there sometimes metaphorically described under splendid sensible images, which his Lordship is pleased to reflect upon as trifling and childish,[§] yet the idea there given us of it is the noblest, the sublimest, that can be conceived. It is represented as a state of consummate holiness, goodness, and purity, where we shall arrive to the true perfection of our natures; a state into which *nothing shall enter that defileth*; where the spirits of the just shall be *made perfect*, and even their bodies shall be refined to a wonderful degree; where they shall be associated to the glorious general assembly of holy and happy souls, and to the most excellent part of God's creation, with whom they shall cultivate an eternal friendship and harmony; and, which is chiefly to be considered, where they shall be admitted to the immediate vision of the Deity, and shall be transformed, as far as they are capable of it, into the divine likeness. Such is the happiness the gospel setteth before us, and which certainly furnisheth a motive fitted to work upon the worthiest minds. And the being animated by the hope of such a reward hath nothing mean or mercenary in it, but rather is an argument of a great and noble soul.

And even as to the fear of punishment, this also may be of signal use to restrain the exorbitancies of the passions, to check the career of vice, and to awaken men to serious thoughts, and thereby put them in the way of better impressions. His Lordship himself

mote it in our several stations, make a part of that excellent and praise-worthy conduct, which it is the great design of the Christian religion to promote, and which, according to the divine promises there given us, shall be crowned with a glorious reward.

^{*} Characteristics, p. 98, 99, 100, 101.

[†] Ibid. vol. ii. p. 59.

[‡] Ibid. vol. ii. p. 55, 56.

[§] Ibid. vol. i. p. 282.

asserteth the usefulness of punishments, as well as rewards, in all well-regulated governments. And with respect to future punishments he acknowledgeth, that "this service of fear be allowed ever so low and base, yet religion being still a discipline and progress of the soul towards perfection, the motive of reward and punishment is primary, and of the highest moment with us, till being capable of more sublime instructions, we are led from this servile state to the generous service of affection and love."* And he elsewhere expressly declareth, that "the hope of future rewards, and fear of future punishments, how mercenary or servile soever it may be accounted, is yet in many instances a great advantage, security, and support to virtue;" and he offereth several considerations to prove that it is so.† I cannot therefore help thinking that this admired writer has done very wrong in throwing out so many insinuations against the doctrine of future retributions, and against the holy Scriptures and Christian divines for insisting so much upon it, as though it were of ill influence to morals. I am persuaded, that any one who duly considers the state of mankind, and what a mighty influence our hopes and fears have upon us by the very frame of our nature, must be sensible, that if the Scripture had only contained fine and elegant discourses on the beauty of virtue, and the deformity of vice, instead of proposing the sanctions of eternal rewards and punishments, it would neither have been so becoming the majesty and dignity of the supreme legislator, nor so well fitted to answer the end of a revelation designed for common use. The Scripture, indeed, doth every where suppose, and frequently representeth the excellence of holiness and virtue, and the turpitude and deformity of vice and sin, and the good effects of the one, and bad effects of the other, even in this present state. But it is the great advantage of the Christian revelation, that it carrieth our views beyond this narrow transitory scene to a future eternal state, and deriveth its most important motives from thence, which he himself acknowledgeth to be of infinitely greater force; and, which is very odd, he seemeth to make the very force of those motives an objection against insisting upon them, as if they would render all other motives and considerations useless.

The prejudices his Lordship hath conceived against Christianity sufficiently appear from several of those passages that have been mentioned; to which many others might be added. He is pleased, indeed, more than once to declare himself a very orthodox believer. He hath assured us, in his ironical way, of his *steady orthodoxy*, and *entire submission to the truly Christian and Catholic doctrines of our holy church, as by law established*: and that he faithfully embraces the *holy mysteries of our religion even in the minutest particulars, notwithstanding their amazing depth*.‡ For which he gives this reason, that "when the supreme powers have given their sanction to a religious record or pious writ, it becomes immoral and

* *Characteristics*, vol. ii. p. 63, 273.

† *Ibid.* vol. ii. p. 60, & seq.

‡ *Ibid.* vol. iii. p. 315, 316.

profane in any one to deny or dispute the divine authority of the least line or syllable contained in it."* To the same purpose he elsewhere declares, that the mysteries of religion are to be *determined* by those to whom the state has *assigned the guardianship and promulgation of the divine oracles*; and that the *authority and direction of the law* is the *only security against heterodoxy and error*, and the only warrant for the authority of our *sacred symbols*.† So that according to him, Christianity has no other foundation than what will serve a false religion as well as the true. And elsewhere, in the person of the sceptic, he talks of our *visible sovereign's answering for us in matters of religion*.‡ In this his Lordship exactly agrees with Mr. Hobbes: he is, indeed, far from asserting with that writer, that there is nothing good or evil in its own nature, and that virtue and vice depend wholly on human authority and laws; this he on all occasions strenuously argueth against. But he comes into another part of his scheme, the making the magistrate or supreme civil power, the sole judge of religious truth and orthodoxy, and resolving all doctrines and opinions in religion, and the authority of what shall be accounted holy writ, into the appointment of the state, a scheme which absolutely destroyeth the rights of private judgment and conscience, and which evidently condemneth the conduct and judgment of Christ and his apostles, and the primitive Christians at the first plantation of Christianity, and of those excellent men that stood up for the reformation of it since.

But notwithstanding our noble author's pretended veneration and submission to the holy writ *by public authority established*, he hath taken occasion to expose the Scripture, as far as in him lay, to ridicule and contempt, of which many instances might be produced. Not to mention the insinuations he has thrown out relating to particular passages both in the Old Testament and the New, he hath endeavoured to expose the spirit of prophecy, and made a ludicrous representation of it, and compared it with the extravagancies of the maddest enthusiasts.§ Miracles he will not allow to be any proofs, though ever so certain;|| or that there is any ground to believe their having been done, but the authority of our governors, and of those whom the *state* hath appointed the *guardians of holy writ*.¶ He speaks with ridicule, as other deistical writers have often done, of what he calls the *specious pretence of moral certainty*, and *matter of fact*,** and insinuates, that the facts recorded in the gospels are absolutely uncertain, and that he that relies upon those accounts must be a *sceptical Christian*.†† He represents St. Paul as speaking *sceptically*, and as *no way certain or positive as to the revelation made to him*, though the contrary is manifest from the apostle's own most express declarations.‡‡ The very encomiums he sometimes pretends to bestow upon the Scriptures are of such a kind, as tend

* Characteristics, p. 231.

† Ibid. p. 71. vol. i. p. 360.

‡ Ibid. vol. ii. p. 333.

§ Ibid. vol. i. p. 45. vol. iii. p. 67.

|| Ibid. vol. ii. p. 331, 332.

¶ Ibid. vol. iii. p. 71, 73.

** Ibid. vol. i. p. 44.

†† Ibid. vol. iii. p. 72.

‡‡ Ibid. p. 74, 75.

rather to give a low and mean idea of them. 'Thus he commends the *poetical parts of Scripture*, Job, Psalms, Proverbs, and other entire volumes of the sacred collection, as full of humorous discourses, and jocular wit; and saith, that the sacred writers "had recourse to humour and diversion, as a proper means to promote religion, and strengthen the established faith." In like manner he tells us, that our Saviour's discourses were *sharp, witty, and humorous*; and that his miracles were done with a *certain air of festivity*; and so that it is impossible not to be moved in a pleasant manner at their recital; i. e. it is impossible not to laugh at them.* But though he seemeth here to commend his *good humour*, as he calls it, and elsewhere represents Christianity as, *in the main, a witty good-natured religion*, he insinuateth that this may be all an artful pretence to cover deep designs and schemes laid for worldly ambition and power. Having observed, that the affection and love which procures a true adherence to the *new religious foundation*, must depend either on a *real or counterfeit goodness in the religious founder*, whom he had called before the *divinely-authorized instructor and spiritual chief*; he adds, that "whatever ambitious spirit may inspire him, whatever savage zeal or persecuting principle may be in reserve, ready to disclose itself, when authority and power is once obtained, the first scene of doctrine however fails not to present us with the agreeable views of joy, love, meekness, gentleness, and moderation."† I believe few that consider how this is introduced, will doubt its being designed as an insinuation against the character of the holy Jesus; an insinuation for which there is not the least foundation in his whole conduct, or in the scheme of religion he hath taught, and which therefore is as malicious as it is groundless.

Agreeably to this he elsewhere intimates, that the gospel was only a scheme of the clergy for aggrandizing their own power. He represents it as a *natural suspicion* of those who are called sceptical: "that the holy records themselves were no other than the pure invention and artificial compliment of an interested party, in behalf of the richest corporation, and most profitable monopoly, which could be erected in the world."‡ But any one that impartially considers the idea of religion set before us in the New Testament, in its primitive simplicity, will be apt to look upon that which his Lordship representeth as a *natural supposition* to be the most unreasonable supposition in the world. If an ambitious and self-interested clergy, and particularly the favourers of the papal hierarchy, had been to forge a gospel or sacred records to countenance their own claims, or if they had had it in their power to have corrupted and new-modelled them in their favour, the Christian religion and worship would in many instances have been very different from what it now appeareth to be in the sacred writings of the New Testament. Mr. Hobbes himself was so sensible of this, even where he inveighs against the clergy, as endeavouring to put

* Characteristics, vol. iii. p. 118, 122, 123. † Ibid. p. 114, 115. ‡ Ibid. p. 336.

their own laws upon the Christian people for the laws of God, and pretends that the books of the New Testament were in the first ages in the hands only of the ecclesiastics, that he adds, "he is persuaded they did not falsify the Scripture; because, if they had had an intention so to do, they would surely have made them more favourable to their power over Christian princes, and civil sovereignty, than they are."*

His Lordship on many occasions insinuates, that the original records of Christianity are not at all to be depended upon. He frequently repeats the charge of corruptions and interpolations; and particularly concludes the last Miscellany of his third volume with a heap of objections against the Scriptures, drawn from the great number of copies, various readings, different glosses and interpretations, apocryphal and canonical books, frauds of those through whose hands they have been transmitted to us, &c.† These objections are put into the mouth of a gentleman, whom he makes go off the stage with an air of triumph, as they were unanswerable; and yet they are no other than what have been frequently considered and obviated by the learned defenders of the Christian cause. Dr. Tindal hath since urged all these objections, and more of the same kind, more largely and with greater force than his Lordship hath done; and a full answer hath been returned to them, sufficient to satisfy an impartial inquirer.‡

I have already dwelt longer on this right honourable author than I at first intended; but you will undoubtedly expect that, before I leave him, I should take some notice of that part of his scheme, where he seems to set up ridicule as the best and surest criterion of truth: this deserves the rather to be considered, because there is not perhaps any part of his writings of which a worse use hath been made. I am sensible that some ingenious writers have been of opinion, that in this his Lordship has been greatly misunderstood or misrepresented; that his opinion, if fairly examined, amounts only to this, that ridicule may be of excellent use, either against ridicule itself, when false and misapplied, or against grave, specious, and delusive impostures; that he distinguishes between true and false ridicule, and between *genteel wit*, and *scurrilous buffoonery*, which, without decency or distinction, raises a laugh from every thing. This he condemneth, as justly offensive, and unworthy of a gentleman and a man of sense. He would have religion treated with *good manners*, and is for subjecting ridicule to the judgment of reason; and he declares, that as he is in *earnest in defending raillery*, so he can be *sober in the use of it*. Several passages are produced to this purpose.§ But whatever apology may be made for this noble writer, I think it cannot be denied, that he has frequently expressed himself very incautiously on this head, and in a manner that may lead persons into a very wrong method

* Hobbes's *Leviath.* p. 203, 204. † *Characteristics*, vol. iii. p. 317—344.

‡ See particularly *Answer to Christianity as old as the Creation*, vol. ii. chap. 5, 7, 8.

§ *Characteristics*, vol. i. p. 11, 63, 83, 85, 128.

of inquiring and judging concerning truth. He not only expressly calls ridicule a *test*, and a *criterion of truth*, but declares for applying it to every thing, and in all cases. He would have us carry the *rule* of ridicule constantly with us, *i. e.* that we must be always in a disposition to apply ridicule to whatever offers, to see whether it will bear.* He observes, that "truth may bear all lights; and one of those principal lights or natural mediums, by which things are to be viewed in order to a thorough recognition, is ridicule itself, or that manner of proof (for so he calls it) by which we discern whatever is liable to just raillery on any subject:"† and though he doth not approve the seeking to *raise a laugh for every thing*, yet he thinks it right to *seek in every thing what justly may be laughed at.*‡ He declares, that "he hardly cares so much as to think on the subject of religion, much less to write on it, without endeavouring to put himself in as good a humour as possible;"§ *i. e.* treating it, as he himself expresseth it, in a way of *wit* and *raillery*, *pleasantry* and *mirth*. And, indeed, what kind of ridicule his Lordship is for, and how he is for applying it in matters of religion, plainly appears from many specimens he has given us of it in several parts of his works; especially in his third volume, which is designed as a kind of review and defence of all his other treatises.

The best and wisest men in all ages have always recommended a calm attention and sobriety of mind, a cool and impartial examination and inquiry, as the properest disposition for finding out truth, and judging concerning it. But according to his Lordship's representation of the case, those that apply themselves to the searching out truth, or judging what is really true, serious, and excellent, must endeavour to put themselves in a merry humour, to raise up a gaiety of spirit, and seek whether in the object they are examining they cannot find out *something that may be justly laughed at*. And it is great odds, that a man who is thus disposed will find out something fit, as he imagines, to excite his mirth, in the most serious and important subject in the world. Such a temper is so far from being an help to a fair and unprejudiced inquiry, that it is one of the greatest hindrances to it. A strong turn to ridicule hath a tendency to disqualify a man for cool and sedate reflection, and to render him impatient of the pains that are necessary to a rational and deliberate search. A calm dispassionate love of truth, with a disposition to examine carefully and judge impartially, and a prevailing inclination to jest and raillery, seldom meet together in the same mind. This discovereth rather an odd turn and vivacity of imagination, than strong reason and sound judgment; and it would be a strange attempt to set up wit and imagination, instead of reason and judgment, for a judge and umpire in matters of the greatest consequence.

Our noble author indeed frequently observes, that truth cannot

* Characteristics, p. 11, 12.

‡ Ibid. p. 128.

† Ibid. vol. i. p. 61.

§ Ibid. p. 128.

be hurt by ridicule, since, when the ridicule is wrong placed, it will not hold. "Nothing is ridiculous, but what is deformed, nor is any thing proof against raillery, but what is handsome and just; this weapon therefore can never bear an edge against virtue and honesty, and bears against every thing contrary to it."* It will be readily allowed, that truth and honesty cannot be the subject of *just* ridicule; but then this supposeth, that ridicule itself must be brought to the test of cool reason; and accordingly his Lordship acknowledges, that it is *in reality a serious study to temper and regulate that humour*.† And thus, after all, we are to return to gravity and serious reason as the ultimate test and criterion of ridicule and of every thing else. But though the most excellent things cannot be justly ridiculed; and ridicule, when thus applied, will, in the judgment of wise and thinking men, render him that useth it ridiculous; yet there are many persons on whom it will have a very different effect. The ridicule will be apt to create prejudices in their minds, and to inspire them with a contempt, or at least a disregard of things, which, when represented in a proper light, appear to be of the greatest worth and importance. *The face of truth* indeed, as his Lordship observes, *is not less fair and beautiful for all the counterfeit vizards that have been put upon it*; yet these vizards may so conceal and disguise its beauty, as to make it look a quite different thing from what it really is. It cannot be denied, that truth, piety, and virtue, have often been the subjects of ridicule; and bad, but witty men have met with too much success in exposing them to the derision and contempt, instead of recommending them to the esteem and veneration of mankind. It is our author's own observation, that *false earnest is ridiculed, but the false jest passes secure*. And though he says, he cannot conceive how any man should be *laughed out of his wits*, as some have been *frightened out of them*, yet there have been and are too many instances of persons that have been laughed out of their religion, honesty, and virtue. Weak and unstable minds have been driven into atheism, profaneness, and vice, by the force of ridicule, and have been made ashamed of that which they ought to esteem their glory.

His Lordship is pleased to represent ridicule as the fittest way of dealing with *enthusiasts* and *venders of miracles and prophecy*; and having mentioned the reveries of the French prophets, and recommended *Bartlemy-Fair drollery*, as proper to be used on such occasions, he gives a broad hint, that if this method had been taken against the Reformation, or against Christianity at its first rise, it would have been effectual to destroy it, without having recourse to persecution.‡ He has here plainly let us know in what light he regardeth our holy religion. On other occasions, he declares only for genteel raillery: but here it seems what he calls the *Bartlemy-Fair method*, which I believe will hardly pass for very genteel rail-

* *Characteristics*, vol. 1. p. 11, 128, 129.

† *Ibid.* p. 128.

‡ *Ibid.* vol. i. p. 28, 29.

lery, is supposed to be sufficient, not only against that set of *enthusiasts* who were called the French prophets, but against Christianity itself. But he seems not to have considered, that the great author and first publishers of the Christian religion were scoffed and derided, as well as exposed to grievous sufferings and torments, and that they had *trial of cruel mockings*, as well as of *bonds and imprisonments*. It appears from what remains of the works of Celsus, as well as from what Cæcilius saith in Minucius Felix, that no sarcasm or ridicule was spared among the heathens, by which they thought they could expose Christianity; though when they found this ineffectual to suppress it, they from time to time had recourse to more violent and sanguinary methods: and indeed those that have been most prone to scoff at religion and truth have often been most prone to persecute it too. A scornful and contemptuous spirit, which is an usual attendant on ridicule, is apt to proceed to farther extremes; nor am I sure, that they, who on all occasions throw out the bitterest sarcasms against religion and its ministers, would not, if it were in their power, give more substantial proofs of their aversion. His Lordship indeed honoureth that raillery and ridicule which he recommends, with the name of *good humour*; and by shuffling one of these for the other, and playing upon the words, maketh himself merry with his reader. But *good humour* taken in the best sense, for what he calls the *sweetest, kindest disposition*, is a different thing from that sneering faculty, which disposes men to cast contempt upon persons and things, and which is often managed in a manner little consistent with a true benevolence.

The proper use of ridicule is to expose such follies and absurdities as scarce deserve or admit a very serious consideration; but to recommend raillery and ridicule as fit to be employed on all occasions, and upon the most weighty and important subjects, and as the properest means for discerning truth, appears to be an inverting the just order of things. It is, even when innocently used, for the most part a trifling employment; and a man of great genius cannot addict himself much to it, without descending beneath his character. Indeed there needs no more to give one a disgust at this pretended test of truth, than to consider the use his Lordship has made of it. When he is in any degree serious, he shows how capable he is to inform and please his reader; but when he gives a loose to gaiety and ridicule, he often writes in a manner unworthy of himself. And I am apt to think, that if nothing of his had been published, but the two first treatises of his first volume, and the third volume, in which he chiefly indulges himself in those liberties, he would have generally passed in the world for a sprightly and ingenious, but very trifling writer. He often throws out his sneers and flirts against every thing that comes in his way; and with a mixture of low and solemn phrase, and grave ridicule, he sometimes manages it so, that it is not very easy to discern his true sentiments, and what it is that he really aims at. This is not very consistent with the rule he himself has laid down more than once; viz. That "it is

a mean, impotent, and dull sort of wit, which leaves sensible persons in a doubt, and at a loss to understand what one's real mind is." And, again, he censures "such a feigned gravity, as immoral and illiberal, foreign to the character of a good writer, a gentleman, and a man of sense."* There seems to be no other way of screening him from his own censure, but by supposing that he imagined his true intention with regard to Christianity and the holy Scriptures might be perceived, by any sensible person, through his concealed ridicule. And it must be acknowledged that, for the most part, it is so; though, in some particular places, it is hard to know whether he be in jest or earnest. By this covered way of ridicule he sometimes steals upon the reader before he is aware, and, under the guise of a friend, gives a more dangerous blow, than if he had acted the part of an open and avowed enemy.

Upon the whole it may be justly said, that in this noble and ingenious author we have a remarkable instance of the wrong application of that talent of ridicule, of which he was so great a master. And if it has succeeded ill in his hands, how much more may it be expected to do so in those who, for want of his genius, are not able to rise above low buffoonery, nor capable of distinguishing gross and scurrilous raillery and scandal from wit and delicate ridicule! His Lordship hath since had many awkward imitators, and probably will have more, who will be apt to apply his test of ridicule, not only, as he himself hath given them an example, against revealed religion, but against all religion, even that which is called natural, and against that virtue, of which, in his serious moods, he hath professed himself so great an admirer.

I shall conclude my account of this celebrated author with observing, that the *Characteristics* have been attacked, or at least some particular passages in them have been occasionally animadverted upon by several learned writers, by Bishop Berkley, Dr. Wotton, Dr. Warburton, and others. That part of his Lordship's scheme which represents a regard to future rewards, as derogating from the dignity and excellence of virtue, hath been particularly considered by Mr. Balguy, in a short but judicious tract, written, like his other tracts, in a very polite and masterly manner. It is intitled, *A Letter to a Deist, concerning the Beauty and Excellency of Moral Virtue, and the Support and Improvement which it receives from the Christian Revelation*, 8vo. 1729. But I know of none that has undertaken to answer the whole, but Mr. (now) Dr. John Brown, in a treatise intitled, *Essays on the Characteristics*, published in 1750. This work is divided into three essays; the first is on ridicule, considered as a test of truth; the second is on the obligations of men to virtue, and the necessity of religious principles; the third is on the revealed religion and Christianity. Under these several heads, he hath considered whatever appeared to be most obnoxious in the writings of our noble author.

The length of this letter may seem to need an apology. But you, I know, will agree with me, that as it was proper, in pursuance of the design in which I am engaged, to take notice of this admired writer, so it was necessary to make such observations as might help to obviate the prejudices so many are apt to entertain in his favour, to the disadvantage even of Christianity itself.

LETTER VI.

The Account given of the Earl of Shaftesbury's Writings in the foregoing Letter, vindicated against the Exceptions that had been made against it.—The being influenced by the Hope of the Reward promised in the Gospel hath nothing in it disingenuous and slavish.—It is not inconsistent with loving Virtue for its own sake, but tends rather to heighten our Esteem for its Worth and Amiableness.—The Earl of Shaftesbury seems, in his *Inquiry concerning Virtue*, to erect such a Scheme of Virtue as is independent of Religion, and may subsist without it.—The Apology he makes for doing so.—The close Connection there is between Religion and Virtue shown from his own Principles and Acknowledgments.—Virtue not wholly confined to good Actions towards Mankind, but takes in proper Affections towards the Deity as an essential Part of it.—He acknowledges that Man is born to Religion.—A remarkable Passage of Lord Bolingbroke's to the same Purpose.

SIR,

WHEN I first published the *View of the Deistical Writers*, the foregoing letter contained the whole of what I then intended with regard to the observations on the Earl of Shaftesbury. But not long after the publication of it, some persons, who profess to be real friends to Christianity, and I doubt not are so, let me know that they wished I had not put his Lordship into the list of deistical writers; and they thought the charge against him had in some instances been carried too far. This put me upon revising what I had written relating to that matter with great care; and if I had found just cause to think, that in this instance I had been mistaken in the judgment I had formed, I should have thought myself obliged publicly to acknowledge it. For when I formed the design of taking a view of the deistical writers, I fixed it as a rule to myself, to make a fair representation, as far as I was able, of the sentiments of those writers, and not to push the charge against them farther than there appeared to me to be just ground for. And it would have given me a real pleasure to have reason to rank so fine a writer as the Earl of Shaftesbury among the friends of the Christian cause. But upon the most impartial inquiry I was able to make, I have not seen reason to retract any thing I had offered with regard to that noble Lord. I thought it necessary, therefore, in the *Supplement to the View of the Deistical Writers*, to publish a letter on that subject, which I shall here subjoin to the preceding one,

that the reader may have all before him which relates to that noble writer in one view.

It can scarce, I think, be denied by any impartial person who hath read the *Characteristics* without prejudice, which are the only works he avowed, and which had his last hand, that there are several passages in them, which seem plainly intended to expose Christianity and the holy Scriptures. And there is great reason to apprehend, that not a few have been unwarily led to entertain unhappy prejudices against revealed religion, and the authority of the Scriptures, through too great an admiration of his Lordship's writings. Some instances of this kind have come under my own particular observation; and therefore it appeareth to me, upon the most mature consideration, that I could not, in consistency with the design I had in view, omit the making some observations upon that admired author, as far as the cause of Christianity is concerned.

That part of my observations on Lord Shaftesbury's works which I find hath been particularly excepted against, is the account given of his sentiments with regard to future rewards and punishments. It hath been urged, that his design in what he has written on this subject was, not to insinuate that we ought not to be influenced by a regard to future rewards and punishments, the usefulness of which he plainly acknowledgeth; but only to show, that it is wrong to be actuated merely by a view to the reward, or by a fear of the punishment, without any real inward love to virtue, or any real hatred and abhorrence of vice. To this purpose his Lordship observes, that "to be bribed only, or terrified into an honest practice, bespeaks little of real honesty or worth; and that if virtue be not really estimable in itself, he can see nothing estimable in following it for the sake of a bargain."* He asks, "how shall we deny that to serve God by compulsion, or for interest merely, is servile and mercenary?† And he puts the case of a person's being incited by the hope of reward to do the good he hates, and restrained by the fear of punishment from doing the ill to which he is not otherwise in the least degree averse;" and observes, that "there is in this case no virtue whatsoever."‡ If his Lordship had said no more than this, he would have said no more than every real friend to Christianity will allow; though in this case there would still be great reason to complain of his Lordship's having made a very unfair representation of the sense of those divines who think it necessary to urge the motives drawn from future rewards and punishments. It is true, that if the belief of future retributions should have no other effect than the putting some restraint upon men's outward evil actions, and regulating their external behaviour, even this would be of great advantage to the community; but this is far from being the only or principal thing intended. Those certainly must know little of the nature and tendency of the Christian religion, who should endeavour to persuade themselves or others, that though a

* *Characteristics*, vol. 1. p. 97. † *Ibid.* vol. ii. p. 272. ‡ *Ibid.* p. 55.

man had a real love of vice in his heart, and only abstained from some outward vicious practices for fear of punishment, and though he had an inward aversion to true goodness and virtue, and only performed some outward acts that had a fair appearance; this alone would denominate him a good man, and intitle him to the future reward; for this were to suppose, that though he were really a vicious and bad man, without that purity and sincerity of heart on which the Scriptures lay so great a stress, yet the practising some external acts of obedience, destitute of all true goodness and of virtuous affections, would intitle him to the favour of God, and to that eternal happiness which is promised in the gospel. If any persons should teach this, I would readily join with his Lordship in condemning them. But he hath not contented himself with striking at the supposed wrong sentiments of divines, whom he loves on all occasions to expose. There are several passages in his Lordship's writings which appear to be directly intended to represent the insisting, so much as is done in the gospel, upon the eternal rewards and punishments of a future state, as having a bad influence on the moral temper, and particularly as tending to strengthen an inordinate selfishness, and to diminish the affections towards public good, and to make men neglect what they owe to their friends, and to their country. He plainly intimates the disadvantages accruing to virtue from the having *infinite rewards* in view, and that in that case the *common and natural motives to goodness are apt to be neglected, and lose much by disuse*.^{*} He represents the being influenced by a regard to future rewards and punishments as at the best *disingenuous, servile, and of the slavish kind*; and to this he opposes a *liberal service*, and the *principle of love*, and the *loving God and virtue for God and virtue's sake*;† and accordingly he determines, that those duties, to which men are carried without any view to such rewards, are for that reason more noble and excellent, and argue a higher degree of virtue. If the case really were as his Lordship is pleased to represent it, it must certainly give a very disadvantageous idea of Christianity; as if the insisting upon those most important motives, drawn from a future eternal world, which our Saviour came to set in the strongest light, tended to introduce and cherish a wrong temper of mind, narrow and selfish, disingenuous and servile, to weaken our benevolent affections both public and private, and to take us off from the duties and offices of the civil and social life. At that rate it could not be said that the gospel is a friend to society and to mankind; and instead of promoting the practice of true virtue, it would rather derogate from it, and degrade it from its proper dignity and excellence. It was therefore necessary to show, as I endeavoured to do in my observations on Lord Shaftesbury's writings, that this is far from being a just representation of the nature and tendency of the Christian doctrine of future

^{*} Several passages to this purpose were produced out of the Characteristics in the preceding Letter, which I need not here repeat.

† See Characteristics, vol. ii. p. 271, 272, 273.

rewards and punishments. The most noble and extensive benevolence, exerting itself in all proper effects and instances, in opposition to a narrow selfish disposition, is what Christianity every where recommendeth and enforceth in the most engaging manner; and it is its peculiar advantage, that it carrieth our views to a better state, where the benevolence which is now begun shall be completed, and shall be exercised in a more enlarged sphere, and extend to a nobler society. And can the hope of this possibly tend to diminish our benevolence, or must it not rather heighten and improve it? When a man hath a firm and steady persuasion, that the Supreme Being will reward his persevering constancy in a virtuous course with everlasting felicity, this, instead of weakening his inward affection to virtue, and his moral sense of its worth and excellency, must in the nature of things greatly confirm and establish it. There is therefore an entire consistency between the loving virtue for its own sake, *i. e.* as his Lordship explains it, *because it is amiable in itself*,* and the being animated to the pursuit and practice of it by such rewards as the gospel proposeth; for it never appears more excellent and lovely, than when it is considered as recommending us to the favour and approbation of Him, who is the supreme original Goodness and Excellence, and as preparing us for a complete happiness in a future state, where it shall be raised to the highest degree of beauty and perfection. In like manner it must mightily strengthen our abhorrence of vice, and our sense of its turpitude and malignity, to consider it as not only at present injurious and disgraceful to our nature, but as an opposition to the will and law of the most wise and righteous governor of the world, who will in a future state of retribution inflict awful punishments upon those who now obstinately persist in a presumptuous course of vice and wickedness.

Our noble author himself, when he proposeth to show *what obligation there is to virtue, or what reason to embrace it*, which is the subject of the second book of his *Inquiry*, resolveth it into this, that *moral rectitude or virtue must be the advantage, and vice the misery and disadvantage of every creature*; and that *it is the creature's interest to be holy, good, and virtuous*.† To prove this seems to be the entire design of that book, which he concludes with observing, that *virtue is the good, and vice the ill of every one*. He seems indeed, in displaying the advantages of the one and disadvantages of the other, to confine himself wholly to this present life, and to abstract from all consideration of a future state. But if the representing virtue be to our interest here on earth, and conducive to our present happiness, be a just ground of *obligation to virtue*, and a proper *reason to embrace it*, which his second book is designed to show, then surely, if it can be proved, that it tendeth not only to our happiness here, but to procure us a perfect happiness in a future state of existence, this must mightily heighten the obligation to virtue, and strengthen the reason for embracing it. If having

* *Characteristics*, vol. ii. p. 67.

† *Ibid.* p. 81, 98.

regard to the present advantages of virtue be consistent in his scheme with loving virtue for its own sake, and as amiable in itself, and doth not render the embracing it a mercenary or slavish service, why should it be inconsistent with a liberal service to be assured that it shall make us happy for ever? Or why should they be accounted greater friends or admirers of virtue, who consider its excellency only with regard to the narrow limits of this transitory life, than they who regard it as extending its beneficial influence to a nobler state of existence, and who believe that it shall flourish in unfading beauty and glory to eternity? That an affection in itself worthy and excellent should grow less so, by considering it as so pleasing to the Supreme Being, that he will reward it with everlasting happiness, and raise it to the highest perfection it is capable of in a future state, would be a strange way of reasoning.

It was observed in the account given of the Earl of Shaftesbury's writings, in the preceding letter, that there are several passages in which he acknowledgeth, that the hope of future rewards, and fear of future punishments, is a great advantage, security, and support to virtue. If these passages had been concealed or disguised, there might have been just ground of complaint. But they were fairly laid before the reader, as well as those that seemed to be of a contrary import, that he might be able to form a judgment of his Lordship's sentiments, how far he is consistent with himself, and whether the censures be well founded, which he passeth upon those who insist upon the rewards promised in the gospel as powerful motives to virtue. He chargeth them as "reducing religion to such a philosophy, as to leave no room for the principle of love—and as building a future state on the ruins of virtue, and thereby betraying religion and the cause of God."* He representeth them as if they were against a *liberal service, flowing from an esteem and love of God, or a sense of duty and gratitude, and a love of the dutiful and grateful part, as good and amiable in itself.*† And he expressly declareth, that "the hope of future reward, and fear of future punishment, cannot consist in reality with virtue or goodness if it either stands as essential to any moral performance, or as a *considerable motive* to any act, of which some better affection ought alone to be a sufficient cause."‡ Here he seems not willing to allow, that the regard to future retributions ought to be so much as a *considerable motive* to well-doing; and asserteth, that to be influenced by it as such a motive cannot consist in reality with virtue or goodness. This is in effect to say, that we ought not to be influenced by a regard to future rewards and punishments at all; for if they be believed and regarded at all, they must be a considerable motive: since, as he himself observes, where infinite rewards are firmly believed, they must needs have a mighty influence, and will over-balance other motives.§ If therefore it be inconsistent with true virtue or goodness, to be influenced

* Characteristics, vol. ii. p. 272, 279.

† Ibid. p. 58.

‡ Ibid. vol. ii. p. 270.

§ Ibid. p. 68.

by them as a considerable motive, it is wrong to propose them to mankind; for why should they be proposed, or to what purpose believed, if it be inconsistent with true goodness to be influenced by them in proportion to their worth or importance? His Lordship elsewhere observes, "that, by making rewards and punishments" (i. e. the rewards and punishments proposed in the gospel; for to these he evidently refers) "the principal motives to duty, the Christian religion in particular is overthrown, and the greatest principle, that of love, rejected."* When he here brings so heavy a charge against those who make the rewards of the gospel their *principal motives*, his meaning seems to be this: That they make the hope of future eternal happiness a more powerful motive than the present satisfaction and advantages virtue hath a tendency to produce, which are the motives he so largely insists upon, and which he calls *the common and natural motives to goodness*. And is the being more animated by the consideration of that eternal happiness which is the promised reward of virtue, than by any of the advantages it yields in this present state (though these also are allowed to have their proper weight and influence) so great a fault, as to deserve to be represented as a subverting of all religion, and particularly the Christian? If the eternal life promised in the gospel be rightly understood, the hope of it includeth a due regard to the glory of God, to our own highest happiness, and to the excellence of virtue and true holiness; all which are here united, and are the worthiest motives that can be proposed to the human mind. There is a perfect harmony between this hope, and what his Lordship so much extols, the principle of divine love, *such as separates from every thing worldly, sensual, and meanly interested*; nor can it be justly said, concerning this hope of the gospel reward, what he saith of a *violent affection towards private good*, that the more there is of it, the less room there is for an *affection towards goodness itself, or any good and deserving object, worthy of love and admiration for its own sake, such as God is universally acknowledged to be*.† The very reward itself includeth the perfection of love and goodness; and the happiness promised principally consisteth in a conformity to God, and in the fruition of him; and therefore the being powerfully animated with the hope of it is perfectly consistent with *the highest love and admiration of the Deity, on account of his own infinite excellency*.

It appeareth to me, upon considering and comparing what hath been produced out of Lord Shaftesbury's writings, that though his Lordship's good sense would not allow him absolutely to deny the usefulness of believing future retributions, yet he hath in effect endeavoured on several occasions to cast a slur upon Christianity, for proposing and insisting upon what he calls *infinite rewards*; and thus he hath attempted to turn that to its disadvantage which is its greatest glory, viz. its setting the important retributions of a future state in the clearest and strongest light, and teaching us to raise our

* Characteristics, vol. ii. p. 279.

† Ibid. p. 58, 59.

affections and views to things invisible and eternal. His Lordship hath, upon the most careful and diligent revisal of his works, suffered those obnoxious passages still to continue there. Nor will any man wonder at this, who considereth the design and tendency of many other passages in his writings: That he hath taken occasion to ridicule the spirit of prophecy, and to burlesque several passages of holy writ: That he hath represented the Scriptures as absolutely uncertain, and the important facts by which Christianity is attested, as not to be depended upon: That he hath insinuated injurious reflections upon the character and intentions of the blessed Founder of our holy religion: That he hath represented our faith in the gospel as having no other foundation than the authority of the state; and hath hinted, that it could hardly have stood the test of ridicule, and even of *Bartholomew-fair drollery*, had it been applied to it at its first appearance.*

As I have been engaged so far in an examination of Lord Shaftesbury's writings, I shall take this occasion to make some farther observations on his celebrated *Inquiry concerning Virtue*.

He sets out with observing, that "religion and virtue appear to be so nearly related, that they are generally presumed inseparable companions; but that the practice of the world does not seem in this respect to be answerable to our speculations;" That "many who have had the appearance of great zeal in religion, have yet wanted the common affections of *humanity*."† Others again, who have been considered as mere atheists, have yet been observed to practise the rules of morality, and act in many cases with such good meaning and affection towards mankind, as might seem to force an acknowledgment of their being virtuous."‡ His Lordship therefore proposeth to inquire, "What honesty or virtue is, considered by itself, and in what manner it is influenced by religion; how far religion necessarily implies virtue; and whether it be a true saying, that it is impossible for an atheist to be virtuous, or share any real degree of honesty and merit."§

In that part of the *Inquiry*, in which he proposeth to show what virtue is, he seems to make it properly consist in good affections towards mankind, or in a man's having "his disposition of mind and temper suitable and agreeing to the good of his kind, or of the system in which he is included, and of which he constituteth a part."|| And he had before declared, that some who have been considered as mere atheists have acted with such good affection towards mankind, as might seem to force an acknowledgment that they are virtuous.

* See all this clearly shown, p. 63, and seq.

† It will readily be acknowledged, that the appearance of religion is often separated from true virtue; but real practical religion necessarily comprehendeth virtue; and as far as we are deficient in the practice of virtue, we are deficient in what religion indispensably requireth of us.

‡ *Characteristics*, vol. ii. p. 5, 6.

§ *Ibid.* p. 7.

|| *Ibid.* p. 31. 77, 78. 86, 87, and passim.

And as this is the notion his Lordship gives of the nature of virtue, so when he treats of the obligation to virtue, and the reason there is to embrace it, which is the subject of the second book of the *Inquiry*, he seems to place it in its tendency to promote our happiness in this present life, without taking any notice of a future state.

Accordingly, many have looked upon the *Inquiry* as designed to set up such a notion of virtue and its obligations, as is independent on religion, and may subsist without it. And in the progress of that *Inquiry*, his Lordship takes occasion to compare atheism with superstition or false religion, and plainly gives the former the preference; and seems sometimes to speak tenderly of it. Having observed, that nothing can possibly, in a rational creature, exclude a principle of virtue, or render it ineffectual, except what either, "1. Takes away the natural and just sense of right and wrong; 2. Or creates a wrong sense of it; 3. Or causes the right sense of it to be opposed by contrary affections."* As to the first case, the taking away the natural sense of right and wrong, he will not allow that atheism, or any speculative opinion, persuasion, or belief, is capable immediately or directly to exclude or destroy it; and that it can do it no other way than *indirectly* by the intervention of opposite affections, *casually* excited by such belief.† As to the second case, the *wrong sense*, or *false imagination of right and wrong*, he says, that, "however atheism may be indirectly an occasion of men's losing a good and sufficient sense of right and wrong, it will not, as atheism merely, be the occasion of setting up a false species of it; which only false religion, or fantastical opinion, derived immediately from superstition and credulity, is able to effect."‡ As to the third case, which renders a principle of virtue ineffectual, *viz.* its being opposed by contrary affections, he says, that "atheism, though it be plainly deficient, and without remedy, in the case of ill judgment on the happiness of virtue, yet it is not indeed of necessity the cause of such ill judgment; for without an absolute assent to any hypothesis of theism, the advantages of virtue may possibly be seen and owned, and a high opinion of it established in the mind."§

Our noble author was sensible of the offence he had given, by seeming to speak favourably of atheists, and by erecting a system of virtue independent of religion, or the belief of a Deity; and in a treatise he published some years after the *Inquiry*, intitled, *The Moralists, a Philosophical Rhapsody*, makes an apology for it: That "he has endeavoured to keep the fairest measures he could with men of this sort," (*viz.* atheistical persons, and men of no religion) "alluring them all he was able, and arguing with a perfect indifference even on the subject of a Deity; having this one chief aim and intention, how in the first place to reconcile those persons to the principles of virtue, that by this means a way might be laid

* *Characteristics*, vol. ii. p. 40. † *Ibid.* p. 44, 45. ‡ *Ibid.* p. 46, 51, 52.
§ *Ibid.* p. 69.

open to religion, by removing those greatest, if not only obstacles to it, which arise from the vices and passions of men. That it is upon this account chiefly he endeavours to establish virtue upon principles by which he is able to argue with those who are not yet inclined to own a God or future state.—He owns he has made virtue his chief subject, and in some measure independent on religion; yet he fancies he may possibly appear at last as high a divine as he is a moralist;”—And says, “He will venture to affirm, that whosoever sincerely defends virtue, and is a realist in morality, must of necessity in a manner, by the same scheme of reasoning, prove as very a realist in divinity.”* And elsewhere he says, that “we may justly as well as charitably conclude, that it was his design, in applying himself to the men of looser principles, to lead them into such an apprehension of the constitution of mankind, and of human affairs, as might form in them a notion of order in things, and draw hence an acknowledgment of the wisdom, goodness, and beauty, which is Supreme; that being thus far become proselytes, they might be prepared for that divine love which our religion would teach them, when once they should embrace it, and form themselves to its sacred character.”†

This must be owned to be a handsome apology; so that if we take his Lordship's own account of his intention in his *Inquiry*, it was not to favour atheism, but rather to reclaim men from it; to reconcile atheists to the principles of virtue, and thereby bring them to a good opinion of religion. It may no doubt be of real service to the interests of virtue, to endeavour to make men sensible of its great excellence in itself, and its present natural advantages, which his Lordship sets forth at large, and in a very elegant manner; and this is no more than hath been often represented by those divines, who yet think it necessary to insist on the rewards and punishments of a future state. There are indeed many that have said, what no man who knows the world and the history of mankind can deny, that in the present situation of human affairs, a steady adherence to virtue often subjects a man to severe trials and sufferings; and that it frequently happeneth, that bad and vicious men are in very prosperous outward circumstances; but I scarce know any that have maintained what his Lordship calls that *unfortunate opinion*, viz. that “virtue is *naturally* an enemy to happiness in life;” or who suppose, that “virtue is the *natural ill*, and vice the *natural good* of any creature.”‡ Nor would any friend to Christianity have found fault with his Lordship's endeavouring to show, that by the very frame of the human constitution, virtue has a friendly influence to promote our satisfaction and happiness, even in this present life; and that vice has naturally a contrary tendency. But certainly it was no way necessary to his design, supposing it to have been, as he professes, to serve the cause of virtue in the world, to throw out so many insinuations as he has done against the being influenced by

* *Characteristics*, vol. ii. p. 266, 268.† *Ibid.* p. 279.‡ *Ibid.* p. 71, 72.

a regard to future rewards and punishments; as if it argued a higher degree of virtue to have no regard to them at all. And though in several passages he shows the advantage which arises to virtue from religion and the belief of a deity, yet whilst he seems to allow that virtue may subsist, and even be carried to a considerable degree without it, I am afraid it will give encouragement to those he calls *the men of looser principles*; and that instead of reclaiming them from atheism, it will tend to make them easy in it, by leading them to think they may be good and virtuous men without any religion at all.

His Lordship seems, from a desire of *keeping the fairest measures*, as he expresses it, *with men of this sort*, to have carried his complaisance too far, when he asserts, that atheism has no direct tendency either to take away and destroy *the natural and just sense of right and wrong*, or to the setting up *a false species of it*. This is not a proper place to enter into a distinct consideration of this subject. I shall content myself with producing some passages from the most applauded doctor of modern atheism, Spinoza, and who hath taken the most pains to form it into a system. He proposeth, in the fifteenth chapter of his *Tractatus Theologico-politicus*, to treat of *the natural and civil right of every man. De jure uniuscujusque naturalis & civili*. And the sum of his doctrine is this; that every man has a natural right to do whatever he has power to do, and his inclination prompts him to; and that the right extends as far as the force. By *natural right, or law, jus et institutum naturæ*, "he understands nothing else but the rules of the nature of each individual; according to which it is determined to exist and act after a certain manner*."

* Per jus & institutum naturæ nihil aliud intelligo, quam regulas naturæ uniuscujusque individui, secundum quas unumquodque naturaliter determinatum concipimus ad certo modo existendum & operandum. Ex. gr. pisces a natura determinati sunt ad natandum, magni ad minores comedendum, adeoque pisces summo naturali jure aqua potiuntur, & magni minores comedunt.—"Sequitur unumquodque individuum jus summum habere ad omnia quæ potest.—Nec hic ullam agnoscimus differentiam inter homines & reliqua naturæ individua, neque inter homines ratione præditos, & inter alios qui veram rationem ignorant, neque inter fatuos, delirantes, & sanos." Quare inter homines quamdiu sub imperio solius naturæ vivere considerantur, tam ille qui rationem nondum novit, vel qui virtutis habitum nondum habet, ex solis legibus appetitus summo jure vivit, quam ille qui ex legibus rationis vitam suam dirigit. Hoc est, sicuti sapiens jus summum habet ad omnia quæ ratio dictitat, sive ex legibus rationis vivendi; sic etiam ignarus et animi impotens summum jus habet ad omnia quæ appetitus suadet, sive ex legibus appetitus vivendi. Jus itaque naturale uniuscujusque hominis, non sana ratione, sed cupiditate et potentia determinatur.—Quicquid itaque unusquisque qui sub solo naturæ imperio consideratur, sibi utile vel ductu sanæ rationis, vel ex affectuum impetu judicat, id summo naturæ jure appetere, et quacunque ratione, sive vi, sive dolo, sive precibus, sive quocunque demum modo facilius poterit, ipse capere licet, et consequenter pro hoste habere eum, qui impedire vult, quo minus animum expleat suum. Ex quibus sequitur jus et institutum naturæ sub quo omnes nascuntur, et maxima ex parte vivunt, nihil nisi quod nemo cupit, et nemo potest, prohibere; non contentiones, non odia, non iram, non dolorem, nec absolute aliquid quod appetitus suadet, aversari. Nec mirum, nam natura non legibus humane rationis, quæ non nisi verum utile et conversationem intendunt, sed infinitis aliis, quæ totius naturæ, cujus homo particula est, æternum ordinem respiciunt; ex cujus sola necessitate, omnia individua certo modo determinantur ad existendum et operandum.—Ostendimus jus naturale sola potentia cuiusque determinari.—Nemo, nisi promisso aliud accedat, de fide alterius potest esse certus, quandoquidem unusquisque naturæ jure dolo agere potest; nec pactis stare tenetur, nisi spe majoris boni, vel metu majoris mali.—Tract. Theolog. Polit. cap. xvi.

And after having observed, that "the large fishes are determined by nature to devour the smaller, and that therefore they have a natural right to do so," and that "every individual has the *highest right* to do all things which it has power to do;" he declares, that "in this case he acknowledges no difference between men and other individuals of nature, nor between men that make a right use of their reason and those that do not so; nor between wise men and fools; that he who does not yet know reason, or has not attained to a habit of virtue, hath as much the highest natural right to live according to the sole laws of appetite, and to do what that inclines him to, as he that directs his life by the rules of reason hath to live according to reason." Accordingly, he directly asserts, "that the natural right of every man is determined not by sound reason, but by inclinations or appetite and power; that therefore whatever any man, considered as under the sole government of nature, judges to be useful for himself, whether led by sound reason, or prompted by his passions, he has the highest natural right to endeavour to procure it for himself any way he can, whether by force or fraud; and consequently to hold him for an enemy, who would hinder him from gratifying his inclination; and that from hence it follows, that the right and law of nature, under which all are born, and for the most part live, only prohibits that which a man does not desire, or which is out of his power; nor is it averse to contentions, hatred, wrath, deceit, or to any thing that the appetite puts him upon. And no wonder; for nature is not confined within the laws of human reason, which only intend the true benefit of mankind, but depends upon infinite other things which respect the eternal order of universal nature, of which man is only a minute part; from the necessity of which alone all individuals are determined to exist and operate after a certain manner." He often repeats it in that chapter, that "natural right is only determined by the power of every individual." And he expressly asserts, that "no man can be sure of another man's fidelity, except he think it his interest to keep his promise; since every man has a natural right to act by fraud or deceit, nor is obliged to stand to his engagements, but from the hope of greater good, or fear of greater ill."

I think it must be owned, that these principles have not merely an *indirect* and *casual*, but a plain and direct tendency, to take away or pervert the natural sense of *right* and *wrong*, or to introduce a false species of it, if the substituting power and inclination instead of reason and justice can be accounted so. This is to argue consequentially from atheism, when all things are resolved into nature and eternal necessity, by which are understood the necessary effects of matter and motion. Spinoza indeed owns, that it is more profitable to live according to the dictates of reason, or the prescriptions of the civil laws, than merely according to appetite or natural right. But whilst men think they have the highest natural right to do whatever they have power to do, and inclination prompts them to, civil laws will be but feeble ties, and bind a man no farther than when he has

not power, or thinks it not for his interest to break them. Virtue and vice, fidelity and fraud, are on a level; the one equally founded in natural right as the other; and how any man can be truly virtuous upon this scheme I cannot see.

It appears to me therefore, that, instead of endeavouring to show that virtue may subsist without religion, or the belief of a God and a future state, one of the most important services that can be done to mankind is to show the close connection there is between religion and virtue or good order, and that the latter cannot be maintained without the former. And this indeed plainly follows from some of the principles laid down by our noble author in his *Inquiry*.

Although he seems to have intended to show, that an atheist may be really virtuous; and observes, in a passage cited above, that without the belief of a Deity, "the advantages of virtue may possibly be seen and owned, and a high opinion of it established in the mind," he there adds, "however it must be confessed, that the natural tendency of atheism is very different *;" where he seems plainly to allow, that atheism is *naturally* an enemy to virtue, and that the direct tendency of it is to hinder the mind from entertaining a right opinion of virtue, or from having a due sense of its advantages. And elsewhere, speaking of the atheistical belief, he observes, that it "tends to the weaning the affections from every thing amiable and self-worthy; for how little disposed must a person be to love or admire any thing as orderly in the universe, who thinks the universe itself a pattern of disorder!"† To this may be added another remarkable passage, in which his Lordship declares, that "he who only doubts of a God may possibly lament his own unhappiness, and wish to be convinced; but that he who denies a Deity is daringly presumptuous, and sets up an opinion against the sentiments of mankind and being of society;" where he seems plainly to pronounce, that atheism is subversive of all virtue, which in his scheme hath an essential relation to society and the good of the public. And accordingly he adds, "that it is easily seen, that one of these" (*viz.* he that only doubts) "may bear a due respect to the magistrates and laws, but not the other (*viz.* he that denies a Deity), "who being obnoxious to them is justly punishable‡."

Several passages might be produced, in which his Lordship represents the tendency religion hath to promote virtue. He observes, that "nothing can more highly contribute to the fixing of right apprehensions, and a sound judgment or sense of right and wrong, than to believe a God, who is represented such, as to be a true model or example of the most exact justice, and highest goodness and worth!"§ And again, that "this belief must undoubtedly serve to raise and increase the affection towards virtue, and help to submit and subdue all other affections to this alone.—And that, when this theistical belief is entire and perfect, there must be a steady opinion of the superintendency of a Supreme Being, a witness and spectator

* *Characteristics*, vol. ii. p. 69. † *Ibid.* p. 70. ‡ *Ibid.* p. 260. § *Ibid.* p. 51.

of human life, and conscious of whatsoever is felt or acted in the universe; so that in the perfectest recess, or deepest solitude, there must be one still presumed remaining with us, whose presence singly must be of more moment than that of the most august assembly upon earth; and that in such a presence, as the *shame* of guilty actions must be the greatest of any, so must the honour be of well-doing, even under the unjust censures of a world. And in this case it is very apparent, how conducing a perfect theism must be to virtue, and how great a deficiency there is in atheism*." He shows, that "where by the violence of rage, lust, or any other counter-working passions, the good affection may frequently be controled and overcome—if religion interposing creates a belief, that the ill passions of this kind, no less than their consequent actions, are the objects of a Deity's animadversion; it is certain, that such a belief must prove a seasonable remedy against vice, and be in a particular manner advantageous to virtue†. And he concludes the first book of the *Inquiry concerning Virtue* with observing, that "we may hence determine justly the relation which virtue has to piety; the first not being complete but in the latter. And thus," saith he, "the perfection and height of virtue must be owing to the belief of a God‡.

From these passages it sufficiently appears, that those who would separate virtue from religion cannot properly plead Lord Shaftesbury's authority for it. And indeed not only is religion a friend to virtue, and of the highest advantage to it, but as it signifies proper affections and dispositions towards the Supreme Being, is itself the noblest virtue. It is true, that his Lordship seems frequently to place virtue wholly in good affections towards mankind. But this appears to be too narrow a notion of it. He himself makes *virtue* and *moral rectitude* to be equivalent terms;§ and moral rectitude seems as evidently and necessarily to include right affections towards God, as towards those of our own species. He that is deficient in this, must certainly be deficient in an essential branch of good affections, or moral rectitude. If a human creature could not be said to be rightly disposed, that was destitute of affections towards its natural parents, can he be said to be rightly disposed, who hath not a due affection towards the *Common Parent*, as Lord Shaftesbury calls him, of all intellectual beings? This noble writer describes virtue to be that which is beautiful, fair, and amiable in disposition and action. And he asks, "Whether there is on earth a fairer matter of speculation, a goodlier view or contemplation, than that of a *beautiful, proportioned, and becoming* action?"|| And is there any thing more beautiful, more justly proportioned, and more becoming, than the acting suitably to the relation we bear to the Supreme Being, and the serving, adoring, and honouring him, as far as we are capable of doing so? Is there such a beauty and harmony in good affections towards those of our own species, and must there

* *Characteristics*, vol. ii. p. 57. † *Ibid.* p. 60, 61. ‡ *Ibid.* p. 76. § *Ibid.* p. 77. 81
|| *Ibid.* vol. ii. p. 105.

not be still more beauty and excellency in having our minds formed to proper affections and dispositions towards our Maker, Preserver, and Benefactor, the *source and principle*, to use our author's expressions, *of all being and perfection, the supreme and sovereign beauty, the original of all which is good and amiable?* His Lordship speaks in the highest terms of the pleasing consciousness which is the effect of love or kind affections towards mankind. But certainly there is nothing that can yield more of a divine satisfaction, than that which ariseth from a consciousness of a man's having approved himself to the best of beings, and endeavoured to promote his glory in the world, and to fulfil the work he hath given us to do. And it will be readily acknowledged, that a necessary part of this work is the doing good to our fellow-creatures.

The very notion he so frequently gives of virtue, as having an essential relation to a system, seems, if understood in its proper extent, to include religion, and cannot subsist without it. His Lordship indeed frequently explains this as relating to the system of the human species, to which we are particularly related, and of which we constitute a part. But he also represents the human system as only a part of the universal one, and observes, that "as man must be considered as having a relation abroad to the system of his kind, so even the system of his kind to the animal system; this to the world (our earth), and this again to the bigger world, the universe." * And that "having recognised this uniform consistent fabric, and owned the universal system, we must of consequence acknowledge an universal mind." † He asserts, that "good affection, in order to its being of the right kind, must be *entire*;" and that "a partial affection, or social love in part, without regard to a complete society or whole, is in itself an inconsistency, and implies an absolute contradiction." ‡ But how can that affection to the system be said to be entire, or of the right kind, which hath no regard to the author of it, on whom the whole system, the order, and even the very being of it, absolutely depends; and without whom indeed there could be properly no system at all, nothing but disorder and confusion? On this occasion it will be proper to produce a remarkable passage in his third volume; where he observes, that "if what he had advanced in his *Inquiry*, and in his following *Philosophic Dialogue*, be read, it will follow, that since man is so constituted by means of his rational part, as to be conscious of this his more immediate relation to the universal system and principle of order and intelligence, he is not only by nature *sociable* within the limits of his own species or kind, but in a yet more generous and extensive manner. He is not only born to virtue, friendship, honesty, and faith, but to piety, adoration, and a generous surrender of his mind to whatever happens from the *Supreme Cause* or order of things, which he acknowledges entirely just and perfect." §

I have insisted the more largely upon this, because many there

* *Characteristics*, vol. ii. p. 286. † *Ibid.* p. 290. ‡ *Ibid.* p. 110, 113, 114.
§ *Ibid.* vol. iii. p. 224.

are among us that talk highly of virtue, who yet seem to look upon religion to be a thing in which they have little or no concern. They allow that men are formed and designed to be useful to one another; but as to what is usually called piety towards God, or those acts of religion of which God is the immediate object, this does not enter at all into their notion of virtue or morality. They slight it as a matter of no consequence, and think they may be good and virtuous without it. But not to urge, that religion or a true regard to the deity is the best security for the right performance of every other part of our duty, and furnisheth the strongest motives and engagements to it (which certainly ought greatly to recommend it to every lover of virtue), there is nothing which seems to be capable of a clearer demonstration, from the frame of the human nature, and the powers and faculties with which man is endued, than that he alone, of all the species of beings in this lower world, is formed with a capacity for religion; and that consequently this was one principal design of his creation, and without which he cannot properly answer the end of his being. To what hath been produced from the Earl of Shaftesbury, I shall add the testimony of another writer, whom no man will suspect of being prejudiced in favour of religion, the late Lord Viscount Bolingbroke; who, though he sometimes seems to make man only a higher kind of brute, and blames those who suppose that the soul of man was made to *contemplate God*, yet at other times finds himself obliged to acknowledge, that man was principally designed and formed for religion. Thus, in the specimen he gives of a meditation or soliloquy of a devout theist, he talks of feeling the superiority of his species; and adds, "I should rouse in myself a grateful sense of these advantages above all others, that I am a creature capable of knowing, of adoring, and worshipping my Creator, capable of discovering his will in the law of my nature, and capable of promoting my happiness by obeying it*." And in another passage, after inveighing, as is usual with him, against the pride and vanity of philosophers and divines, in exalting man and flattering the pride of the human heart, he thinks fit to acknowledge, that "man is a *religious* as well as *social* creature, made to know and adore his Creator, to discover and to obey his will; that greater powers of reason, and means of improvement, have been measured out to us than to other animals, that we might be able to fulfil the *superior* purposes of our *destination*, *whereof religion is undoubtedly the chief*; and that in these the elevation and pre-eminence of our species over the inferior animals consist†." I think it plainly followeth, from what Lord Bolingbroke hath here observed, and which seems to be perfectly just and reasonable, that they who live in an habitual neglect of religion, are chargeable with neglecting the chief purpose of their being, and that in which the true glory and pre-eminence of the human nature doth principally consist; and

* Lord Bolingbroke's Works, vol. v. p. 390, 391. See also to the same purpose, *ibid.* p. 340.

† *Ibid.* p. 470.

that consequently they are guilty of a very criminal conduct, and which they can by no means approve to the great author of their existence, who gave them their noble powers, and to whom, as the wise and righteous governor of the world, they must be accountable for their conduct.

I have been carried farther in my observations on this subject than I intended ; but if this may be looked upon as a digression, I hope it will not be thought unsuitable to the main design I have in view.

I am, Sir, &c.

LETTER VII.

Mr. Collins's *Discourse of Free-thinking*.—He gives a long Catalogue of Divisions among the Clergy, with a view to show the Uncertainty of the Christian Religion.—His Attempt to prove that there was a general Corruption of the Gospels in the sixth Century.—The Absurdity of this manifested.—His Pretence that Friendship is not required in the Gospel, though strongly recommended by Epicurus, shown to be vain and groundless.—An Account of his Book, entitled, *The Grounds and Reasons of the Christian Religion*.—The pernicious Design and Tendency of that Book shown.—He allows Christianity no Foundation but the allegorical, i. e. as he understands it, the false sense of the Old Testament Prophecies.—His Method unfair and disingenuous.—Some Account of the principal Answers published against the *Scheme of Literal Prophecy considered*, which was designed to be a defence of it.

SIR,

IN the year 1713 came out a remarkable treatise, which it will be necessary to take some notice of, entitled, *A Discourse of Free-thinking, occasioned by the Rise and Growth of a Sect called Free-thinkers*. It was written by Anthony Collins, Esq., though published, as his other writings are, without his name. The same gentleman had in 1707 published an *Essay concerning the Use of Reason in Propositions, the Evidence whereof depends upon human Testimony*; in which there are some good observations, mixed with others of a suspicious nature and tendency. In this essay there are animadversions upon some passages in a tract written by Dr. Francis Gastrel, afterwards Lord Bishop of Chester, entitled, *Some considerations concerning the Trinity, and the Way of managing that Controversy*, published in 1702. To the third edition of which, published in 1707, that learned and judicious divine subjoined a vindication of it, in answer to Mr. Collins's essay. This gentleman also distinguished himself by writing against the immateriality and immortality of the human soul, as he afterwards did against human liberty and free agency; and, with regard to both these, was answered by Dr. Samuel Clarke, with that clearness and strength for which that author was so remarkable. The *Discourse of Free-*

thinking is professedly intended to demonstrate the necessity and usefulness of free-thinking, from reason, and from the examples of the best and wisest men in all ages. But there is great reason to complain of a very unfair and disingenuous procedure throughout the whole book. He all along insinuates, that those who stand up for revealed religion, are enemies to a just liberty of thought, and to a free examination and inquiry. His design is certainly levelled against Christianity, and yet he sometimes affects to speak of it with respect. He no where argues directly against it, but takes every occasion to throw out sneers and insinuations, which tend to raise prejudices in the minds of his readers. No small part of this book is taken up in invectives against the clergy, and in giving an account of the divisions that have been among them about the articles of the Christian faith. If there hath been any thing unwarily advanced by any of them, if they have vented any odd or absurd opinions, or have in the heat of dispute cast rash and angry censures upon one another, these things are here turned to the disadvantage of Christianity itself; as if this excellent religion were to be answerable for all the passions, follies, and exorbitancies of those that make profession of it; or, as if the differences which have been among Christians were a proof, that there is nothing in the Christian religion that can be safely depended upon. This indeed has been a standing topic for declamation in all the deistical writings, though it is founded upon a principle which is manifestly false, *viz.* that whatever has been at any time controverted is doubtful and uncertain; a principle which, as I had occasion to observe before, would set aside the most important truths of natural religion as well as revealed. But these gentlemen too often act, as if they were not very solicitous about the former, provided they could destroy the latter with it.

A great noise is raised in this *Discourse of Free-thinking*, about the pious frauds of ancient fathers and modern clergy, and their forging, corrupting, and mangling of authors; and it is insinuated, that they have altered and corrupted the Scriptures, as best served their own purposes and interests. Lord Shaftesbury had insinuated the same thing before; and these clamours are continually renewed and repeated, though it hath been often shown with the utmost evidence, that a general alteration and corruption of the holy Scriptures was, as the case was circumstanced, an impossible thing. And we have the plainest proof in fact, that even in the darkest and most corrupt ages of the Christian church, the Scriptures were not altered in favour of the corruptions and abuses which were then introduced, since no traces of those corruptions are to be found there; on the contrary, they furnish the most convincing arguments for detecting and exposing those corruptions.

But what he seems to lay the greatest stress upon, is a passage from Victor of Tmuis, in which it is said, that at the command of the emperor Anastasius, the holy gospels were corrected and amended. This our author calls *an account of a general alteration*

of the four gospels in the sixth century; and he says, it was discovered by Dr. Mills, and was very little known before.* But then he should have taken notice of what Dr. Mills has added, viz. that it is certain as any thing can be, that no such altered gospels were ever published; and that if the fact had been thus, it would have been mentioned with detestation by all the historians, and not be found only in one blind passage of a puny chronicle. Indeed there cannot be a plainer instance of the power of that prejudice and bigotry against Christianity, which has possessed the minds of the gentlemen that glory in the name of *Free-thinkers*, than their laying hold on such a story as this to prove a general corruption of the gospels, contrary to all reason and common sense. Let us suppose the emperor Anastasius to have had an intention to alter the copies of the gospels (which yet it is highly improbable he should attempt), he could only have got some of the copies into his hands; there would still have been vast numbers of copies spread through different parts of the empire, which he could not lay hold of, especially considering how much he was hated and opposed; or if we should make the absurd and impossible supposition of his being able to get all the copies throughout the east into his hands; yet as there were still innumerable copies in the west, where he had little or no power, they would have immediately detected the alteration and corruption, if there had been any. Loud complaints would have been made of the attempt, but no such complaints were ever made; and in fact it is evident, that there have been no greater differences since that time between the eastern and western copies than there were before. And it is undeniably manifest, from great numbers of authors, who lived in the preceding ages, and whose works are come down to us, that the Scriptures, a great part of which is transcribed into their writings, were the same before that pretended alteration, that they have been since.

With a view of showing the uncertainty of the sacred text of the New Testament, this author takes notice of the various readings collected by Dr. Mills, which he says amount to thirty thousand. This objection has been so fully exposed, and this whole matter set in so clear a light by the famous Dr. Bentley, under the character of *Phileleutherus Lipsiensis*, that one should think it would have been for ever silenced. And yet it has been frequently repeated since by the writers on that side, and particularly by Dr. Tindal, in his *Christianity as old as the Creation*, without taking the least notice of the clear and satisfactory answer that had been returned to it.

The ancient prophets have been the constant objects of the sneers and reproaches of these gentlemen, and accordingly this writer has told us, that, *to obtain the prophetic spirit, they played upon music, and drank wine.*† That they might very lawfully and properly drink wine, in a country where there was great plenty of it, may well be allowed, without any diminution of their character; and

* Discourse of Free-thinking, p. 69, 90.

† Ibid p. 153.

that they employed music, particularly in singing praises to God, may be concluded from several passages in the sacred writings. But certainly, if they had the prophetic spirit at all, neither wine nor music gave it them, or could enable them to foretell things to come. But then he does them the honour to say, *they were great free-thinkers*, and that "they writ with as great liberty against the established religion of the Jews (which the people looked on as the institution of God himself), as if they looked upon it all to be imposture." That the prophets freely declared against the Jewish corruptions, against their idolatries and immoralities, and against their laying the chief stress on ritual observances, whilst they neglected the weightier matters of the law, is very true. And this is here, by an unpardonable disingenuity, represented as an inveighing against the Mosaic dispensation, as if they did not believe it to have been originally of divine institution; whereas it is to the last degree evident, that they all along suppose the law of Moses to have been instituted by God himself, and reprove the people and priests, not for their adherence to that law, but for their deviations from it, and neglect of the most important duties there enjoined.

This gentleman has given us a long list of *free-thinkers*, but there is none of them all of whom he seems to speak with greater complacency than Epicurus, though he owns that his system was a *System of Atheism*.* And after having observed, that Epicurus was eminent for that *most divine of all virtues, friendship*, he says, *that we Christians ought to have a high veneration of him on this account, because even our holy religion itself does not any where particularly require of us this virtue*. The noble author of the *Characteristics* had made the same observation before him, and both the one and the other cite a passage from bishop Taylor, to show that there is no word properly signifying *friendship* in the New Testament. Thus they have happily hit upon an instance in which the morality of the gospel is defective, and exceeded by that of Epicurus. But it ought to be considered, that friendship, when understood of a particular affection between two or more persons, is not always a virtue. It may in some cases encroach upon a nobler and more extensive benevolence, and may cause persons, and hath often done so, to sacrifice the most important duties to private affections. Or, where this is not the case, yet where friendship ariseth from a particular conformity of natural tempers and inclinations between some men and others, or, as Lord Shaftesbury expresses it, that peculiar relation which is formed by a consent and harmony of minds, it does not properly come under the prescription of a law, nor can be the matter of a general precept. But if it be understood of that benevolence which uniteth virtuous minds in the sacred bands of a special cordial affection, never was this more strongly recommended and enforced than in the gospel of Jesus. It requireth us to love and do good to all mankind, in which sense bishop Taylor rightly observes,

* Discourse of Free-thinking, p. 90, 129.

in the very passage referred to, that *Christian charity is friendship to all the world*. And the last-mentioned noble writer asketh, *Can any friendship be so heroical as love to mankind?** And, besides this general affection towards all men, the gospel requireth us to cultivate a still nearer, stronger, and more intimate affection towards good men, whom it representeth as obliged to *love one another with a pure heart fervently*. Lord Shaftesbury is pleased to mention St. Paul's saying, that, *perhaps for a good man one would even dare to die*, and observes, that the *apostle is so far from founding any precept upon it, that he ushers it in with a very dubious peradventure*.† But it is to be supposed, his Lordship had not considered that noble passage of St. John, *Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he, our Lord Jesus Christ, laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren*, 1 John iii. 16. Can friendship be carried to a nobler height, or be enforced by more engaging motives, or a more powerful example? Can it be pretended, that the *most divine of all virtues, friendship*, is not required of us in our *holy religion*, when we are there required, if properly called to it, to give so glorious a proof of our friendship to our Christian brethren, whom we are taught to regard as united to us by the most sacred ties?

We shall dismiss this *Discourse of Free-thinking* with observing, that as the author of it hath put Solomon into his list of free-thinkers, for asserting, as he pretends he did, the mortality of the soul, and denying a future state, though the contrary is manifest from what Solomon himself saith, Eccles. xii. 7, 14, so he takes that occasion to inform his reader, that the immortality of the soul was *first taught by the Egyptians*, and was an *invention of theirs*.‡ Mr. Toland had said the same thing before in his letters to Serena;§ and this may help us to judge how far some of our boasted free-thinkers are from being friends to natural religion taken in its just extent.

Soon after this *Discourse of Free-thinking* appeared, the reverend Mr. Hoadley, now lord bishop of Winchester, published some very sensible *Queries addressed to the Authors of a late "Discourse of Free-thinking"*; in which the dishonest insinuations, false reasonings, and pernicious tendency of that treatise are laid open in a short and concise, but clear and convincing manner. There were several other ingenious pamphlets published to the same purpose; but none of them was so generally admired and applauded as the *Remarks on a late "Discourse of Free-thinking," by Phileleutherus Lipsiensis, i. e. Dr. Bentley*. This learned writer hath so fully and effectually detected and exposed the great and inexcusable mistakes committed by the author of that discourse, his blunders and absurdities, his frequent wrong translations and misunderstanding of the authors he quotes, or wilful perversions and misrepresentations of their sense,

* Characteristics, vol. ii. p. 229.

† Discourse of Free-thinking, p. 152.

‡ Ibid. vol. i. p. 102.

§ Letter 2d.

that it might, one should think, have discouraged him from appearing any more as a writer in this cause.*

But such was this gentleman's zeal against Christianity, that, some years after, he thought fit to attack it in another way, which was more subtle and more dangerous. He published a *Discourse on the Grounds and Reasons of the Christian Religion*, London, 1724, 8vo. as if his design had been to do real service to Christianity, by establishing it upon a sure and solid foundation. The scheme he lays down is this, that our Saviour and his apostles put the whole proof of Christianity solely and entirely upon the prophecies of the Old Testament; that if these proofs are valid, Christianity is established upon its true foundation; but if they are invalid, and the arguments brought from thence be not conclusive, and the prophecies cited from thence be not fulfilled, *Christianity has no just foundation, and is therefore false*. Accordingly he sets himself to show, that the prophecies cited in the New Testament from the Old, in proof of Christianity, four or five of which he particularly considers, are only typical and allegorical proofs; and that allegorical proofs are no proofs, according to *scholastic rules*, i. e. as he plainly intends it, according to the rules of sound reason and common sense. He asserts, that the expectation of the Messiah did not obtain among the Jews, till a little before the time of our Saviour's appearing, when they were under the oppression of the Romans; and that the apostles put a new interpretation on the Jewish books, which was not agreeable to the obvious and literal meaning of those books, and was contrary to the sense of the Jewish nation: That Chris-

* There was a French translation of the "Discourse of Free-thinking," carried on under Mr. Collins's own eye, and printed at the Hague in 1714, though it bears London on the title page. In this translation several material alterations are made, and a different turn is given to several passages from what was in Mr. Collins's original English. This is plainly done with a view to evade the charges which had been brought against him by Dr. Bentley, under the character of "Phileleutherus Lipsiensis," some of which charges that bore very properly against Mr. Collins's book, as it was first published, will appear impertinent to those that judge only by this translation. But care is taken not to give the least notice of these alterations to the reader, upon whom it is made to pass for a faithful version of the original. All this is clearly shown by the author of the French translation of "Dr. Bentley's Remarks on the Discourse of Free-thinking," which was printed at Amsterdam in 1738, under the title of "*Friponerie Laïque des pretendus Esprits sorts d'Angleterre: The Lay-craft of the pretended Free-thinkers of England.*" This gentleman, Mr. de la Chapelle, has made it appear, that Mr. Collins, and his translator, who acted under his direction, have been guilty of palpable falsifications and frauds, which ill became one who had in that very book raised a loud outcry against the clergy for "corrupting and mangling of authors, and for pious frauds in the translation or publishing of books." And I cannot but observe on this occasion, what must have occurred to every one that has been much conversant in the deistical writers, that it would be hard to produce any persons whatever who are chargeable with more unfair and fraudulent management in their quotations, in curtailing, adding to, or altering, the passages they cite, or taking them out of their connection, and making them speak directly contrary to the sentiments of the authors. It is well known that they affect frequently to quote Christian divines; but they seldom do it fairly, and often wilfully misrepresent and pervert their meaning. Many glaring instances of this sort might be produced out of the writings of the most eminent deistical authors, if any man should think it worth his while to make a collection to this purpose.

tianity deriveth all its authority from the Old Testament, and is wholly revealed there, not literally, but mystically and allegorically; and that therefore Christianity is the allegorical sense of the Old Testament, and is not improperly called *Mystical Judaism*; and that consequently the Old Testament is, properly speaking, the *sole true Canon of Christians*; That the allegorical reasoning is set up by St. Paul, and the other apostles, as the true and only reasoning proper to bring all men to the faith of Christ; and all other methods of reasoning are wholly discarded. Thus it appeareth, that the evident design of this author's book is to show, that the only foundation on which Christianity is built is false; that the first publishers of the gospel laid the whole support and credit of Christ's divine mission, and of the religion he taught, upon pretended Jewish prophecies, applied in a sense which had no foundation in the prophecies themselves, and contrary to the plain original meaning and intention of those prophecies, which the Jews had never understood nor applied in that sense, and which had nothing to support it but allegory; i. e. the mere fancy of him that so applies it. If we needed any farther proof of our author's intentions towards Christianity, it might be observed, that he represents Jesus and his apostles as having founded their religion on *prophecy*, in like manner as the several sects among the heathens did theirs on *divination*. And these prophets, he tells us, manifested their divine inspiration by the *discovery of lost goods, and telling of fortunes*.* So that he makes Jesus and his apostles found their religion on the predictions of fortune-tellers and diviners, and those misapplied too; which plainly shows what a despicable idea this writer intended to convey of the Christian religion, and the blessed author of it.

Few books have made a greater noise than this did at its first publication. The turn given to the controversy had something in it that seemed new, and was managed with great art; and yet, when closely examined, it appears to be weak and trifling. The very fundamental principle of the author's whole system, viz. That the prophecies of the Old Testament are the sole foundation of Christianity, and the only proofs and evidences insisted upon by our Saviour and his apostles in confirmation of it, is absolutely false, as any one may know that can read the New Testament: for it is undeniable, that our blessed Lord often appealeth to his wonderful works, as manifest proofs that the Father had sent him; and the apostles in like manner frequently appealed to his miracles and resurrection, and to the miracles wrought, and the extraordinary gifts of the Holy Ghost poured forth in his name, as uncontested proofs of the divine authority of that scheme of religion which they published to the world. With regard to the prophecies, the course of his reasoning really amounts to this; that because there are difficulties and obscurities attending some very few passages cited out of the Old Testament in the New, as having a reference to the times of the

* Discourse on the Grounds, &c. of the Christian Religion, chap. vi.

gospel, and we cannot well, at this distance, see the propriety of the application, therefore the whole of the New Testament is false ; and the accounts given of our Saviour, his excellent discourses, the miracles he performed, and the illustrious attestations given to him from heaven, are of no force at all ; and all the arguments drawn from thence are ineffectual and vain. It is in the same strain of reasoning that he concludes, that because four or five prophecies (for he produces no more) cited in the New Testament from the Old, seem not to relate to the gospel times in a literal, but in a secondary and typical, i. e. as he explains it, an allegorical sense, therefore none of the Old Testament prophecies can be applied directly and literally at all, or have any relation to our Saviour and the gospel dispensation. And because the modern Jews contest the application of some prophecies to the Messiah, which are applied to our Saviour in the New Testament, therefore the ancient Jews allowed none of those prophecies to be applied to the Messiah, which in the New Testament are applied to him ; and yet the contrary is invincibly evident from their writings still extant, by which it appeareth, that most of the prophecies applied to our Saviour in the New Testament, and many others not there mentioned, were understood of the Messiah by the ancient Jews, as many of them still are by the most celebrated of the modern Jews themselves. And it was certainly a strange attempt in this author to endeavour to prove, that the Jews had no notion or expectation of the Messiah, till a little before the times of our Saviour, when all their writers, with one consent, ancient and modern, who are the proper judges in such a case, agree, that there had been all along among them an hope and expectation of the Messiah, founded, as they universally believed, on the sacred writings. It may further let us see this writer's ingenuity, that because St. Paul makes use of an allegory in his epistle to the Galatians, though he there manifestly introduces it by way of illustration, and expressly declares to those to whom he writes, that these things are *allegorized*, therefore he layeth the whole stress of his argument upon allegory as the principal and only proof ; and that he and the other apostles absolutely reject all other reasoning but the allegorical, which is no reasoning at all. And yet any one that ever read St. Paul's epistles must know, that he often makes use of reasoning and argument, and very close reasoning too. The last instance I shall produce of this author's extraordinary way of arguing is, that because the apostles and sacred writers of the New Testament acknowledge the authority of the Old, and draw proofs from thence, therefore the New Testament is of no authority at all, and the Old Testament is the sole Canon of Christians, i. e. because there is an harmony between the Old Testament and New, and because the former had foretold a glorious person who was to introduce a new and more perfect dispensation ; therefore that new and more perfect dispensation is no new dispensation at all, but is absolutely and in all respects the same with that old and more imperfect one in which it was prefigured and foretold, and which was designed to prepare the way for it.

Having made these general observations, it will be proper to take notice of some of the answers that were made to this book ; and here that which was written by Dr. Chandler, the lord bishop of Coventry and Lichfield, deserves special notice. It was published in 1725, and is entitled *A Defence of Christianity, from the Prophecies of the Old Testament*. This is a very learned and elaborate performance, and executed with great judgment. In it the bishop first sets himself to show, that there was a general expectation of the Messiah at the time when our Saviour appeared ; and he traces this expectation from that time to the very age of the prophets themselves. He then proceeds to show, that to support this expectation there were express literal prophecies that truly concern the Messiah, of which he produces twelve, which he particularly considers ; and he proves with great evidence, that they were applied by the ancient Jews to the Messiah, and that it appeareth from the prophecies themselves, that they could not be applied to any other. He then goes on to show, that, besides these, there were typical prophecies to the same effect, and which were intended to be applied to the Messiah. The author of the *Grounds*, &c. had every where represented typical prophecies as signifying no more than that they were afterwards applied in an allegorical sense, and had asserted that there appear not the least traces of a typical intention in the writers of the Old Testament, or any other Jews of those times. In opposition to which, the bishop plainly proves, from the writings of the prophets themselves, that they were wont to prophesy by types, and to speak of themselves or others as types of other persons and people, on purpose to foretell what should be done by or to single persons or notions hereafter ; of which he gives several instances : That therefore typical actions and typical discourses made part of the prophetic language, and were understood by the people to carry a reference to something future. And consequently, if the prophets speak of the Messiah in their own persons, or of other persons as types of him, there is nothing in this but what is agreeable to the known prophetic language. He makes it appear, that the prophets themselves understood some of those prophecies as typical of the Messiah, and, at the time of delivering those prophecies, gave intimations that they were thus to be referred : That accordingly the Jews acknowledge, that there were types in the Old Testament, and particularly that there were types of the Messiah ; and that both the ancient and modern Jews understand many texts of the Messiah as the Christians do, which are plainly typical ; and he shows, that there were good reasons for covering some of the events relating to the Messiah under the veil of types, which were not to be fully explained till the age in which they were fulfilled.

He next proceeds to give a distinct account of the texts pretended by the author of the *Grounds* to be misapplied. He justly observes, that if the principal characters of the Messiah be evidently found in the Jewish Scriptures, to the same intent for which they are cited by Christ and his apostles, it is unreasonable to quit a certain truth,

because every individual circumstance is not equally clear; and it doth not plainly appear at this time how two or three authorities are to be applied to the Messiah. And that the expression, *that it might be fulfilled*, on which the author layeth so great a stress, was sometimes designed by the Jews to mean no more than that something answered alike in both cases, or that there was a suitableness in the cause or circumstance of one event to the other; and he shows, that the same way of speaking continueth among the Jews to this day.

With regard to the allegorical way, he observes, that it was chiefly in condescension to the Jewish Christians that St. Paul at all used it; but that nothing can be more false and disingenuous, than to pretend that he never used any other way of reasoning than this. Finally, he thinks it may be allowed, that, considering the illustrious attestations given to our Saviour, which plainly showed that he was a teacher sent from God, his interpretation of the prophecies ought to be acquiesced in; since he wrought his miracles by the same spirit by which those prophecies were delivered; and he instances in several prophecies, the interpretation of which given by our Lord, though different from that of the Jews, was actually fulfilled and verified by the event.

There was another learned author of the same name with the bishop, Mr. (now Dr.) Samuel Chandler, who also distinguished himself on this occasion, in a book entitled, *A Vindication of the Christian Religion*, published in 1725, 8vo. In the former part of that work, he hath a discourse on the nature and use of miracles; in which, after having stated the true notion of a miracle, and given the characters that distinguish true miracles from false, he clearly vindicates the miracles of our Saviour, and shows, that as they were circumstanced, they were convincing proofs of his divine mission. The second part of the same book is particularly designed as an answer to the author of the *Grounds and Reasons of the Christian Religion*. After having shown, that the prophecies of the Old Testament are not the only proofs of Christianity, and that it is very absurd to pretend, as that author had done, that the Old Testament is the sole canon of Christians, he clearly evinceth, that many of those prophecies had a farther reference than to the times when they were first delivered; and particularly that they contain a description of a great and good person to proceed from David, who, notwithstanding his sufferings, should be highly exalted, and under whom true religion and righteousness should be more extensive than before; that these prophecies relate principally to a spiritual salvation and deliverance; and that the Jews in our Saviour's time, as appeareth from their most ancient writings, applied many of those prophecies to the Messiah. He next treats of the double sense of prophecies, which the author of the *Grounds* had ridiculed, and shows that there is no absurdity in supposing, that as some prophecies relate wholly to the Messiah, so others may relate partly to his time and partly to the times when they were first discovered; and that this

double sense of the prophecies was originally intended, and was so understood by the Jews. He accounts for the particular places excepted against by the author of the *Grounds*, and observes, as the bishop had done, that the apostles sometimes quote passages from the Old Testament, not in a way of direct proof, but to illustrate the argument they are upon; and sometimes by way of accommodation, to signify a correspondence of events, and to describe things that happened in their own times, by expressions derived from the ancient prophetic writings. That as arguments *ad hominem* have been always allowed, so if there were some particular passages in the ancient prophets, which were applied by the Jews to the Messiah, the reference of which was not so natural and clear, the apostles were fully justifiable in applying them to Jesus Christ, in their reasonings with the Jews, as far as they did agree with his person and character: but that there are few instances of this kind; nor did the apostles make use of this way of argument, except to the Jews or Jewish proselytes; and even to them they did not put the chief stress on these, but laid before them other solid and substantial proofs of Christianity. Finally, if the difficulties which attend the quotations out of the Old Testament were much greater than they really are, yet this would not affect the credit or truth of the Christian religion, which hath so many evidences to support it.

There were several other good answers published to the *Grounds*, &c. and which were so well executed, as to deserve that a particular account should be given of them, if my prescribed limits would allow. Among others, Dr. Bullock's sermons were very justly and highly esteemed, in which "the reasoning of Christ and his apostles in their defence of Christianity is considered. To which is prefixed, a preface, taking notice of the false representations of Christianity, and of the apostles' reasoning in defence of it, in a book entitled *A Discourse of the Grounds and Reasons of the Christian Religion*," London, 8vo. 1725. Dr. Sykes also published an "Essay upon the Truth of the Christian Religion, wherein its real Foundation in the Old Testament is shown, occasioned by the 'Discourse of the Grounds,'" London, 8vo. 1725. In this book it is both clearly proved, that there are some direct prophecies relating to the Messiah in the Old Testament, especially in the book of Daniel; and there are many good observations to show, that the New Testament writers often quote passages by way of accommodation and allusion only; and that most of the texts produced as prophecies by the author of the *Grounds* are of this kind. To these may be added, an ingenious treatise entitled, "The true Grounds and Reasons of the Christian Religion, in Opposition to the false ones set forth in a late Book, entitled 'The Grounds, &c.'" London, 8vo. 1725. "Letters to the Author of the 'Discourse of the Grounds,' showing, that Christianity is supported by Facts well attested; that the words of Isaiah, Chap. vii. 14, in their literal Sense are a Prophecy of the Birth and Conception of the Messias; and that the Gospel-Application of several other Passages in the Old Testament is just,"

by John Greene, 8vo, London, 1726. Mr. Whiston also published, "The literal Accomplishment of Scripture-Prophecies, being a full Answer to a late 'Discourse of the Grounds, &c.'" London, 8vo, 1724: and he afterwards published "A Supplement to the literal Accomplishment of the Scripture-Prophecies," London, 8vo. 1725. It may be proper also to mention a book, which was occasioned by the *Grounds, &c.* though not directly in answer to it, entitled, "The Use and Intent of Prophecy in the several Ages of the Church," by Dr. Thomas Sherlock, bishop of London. This is an excellent performance, in which a regular series of prophecy is deduced through the several ages from the beginning, and its great usefulness shown. The various degrees of light are distinctly marked out, which were successively communicated in such a manner as to answer the great ends of religion, and the designs of Providence, till those great events to which they were intended to be subservient should receive their accomplishment. There was another valuable book, which, though not published till some years after, may be considered as peculiarly designed against the *Grounds, &c.* viz. "The Argument from Prophecy, in Proof that Jesus is the Messiah, vindicated, in some Considerations on the Prophecies of the Old Testament, as the Grounds and Reasons of the Christian Religion," by Moses Lowman, London, 8vo. 1733. The last book I shall here take notice of, as published on this occasion, was "A Review of the Controversy between the Author of the 'Discourse of the Grounds and Reasons of the Christian Religion' and his Adversaries, in a Letter to the Author," 8vo. 1726, by Mr. Thomas Jeffrey. This is drawn up in a clear and judicious manner, and was deservedly well esteemed.

The author of the *Grounds, &c.* thought fit, in 1727, to publish a second book, which was to pass for a defence of his first, in answer to his several adversaries, and particularly to the bishop of *Lichfield*. It was entitled, *The Scheme of Literal Prophecy considered*. In this book he very slightly passeth over the chief things he ought to have proved, and on which in his former book he had laid the greatest stress. Instead of confirming what he had so positively asserted before, that the prophecies of the Old Testament were the only proof on which Christianity is founded, he only shows that they are part of the proof insisted on by our Saviour and his apostles, and most disingenuously supposes, that his adversaries would not allow them to be any proofs at all. He had affirmed with great confidence, that none of the ancient Jews ever understood any of those prophecies of the Messiah, which are applied to Christ in the New Testament; but the utmost that he now attempts to show is, that some of those prophecies were not understood by the ancient Jews of the Messiah; and even for this he can give no other reason than that some of the modern Jews do not so apply them. He has nothing now to prove, that the Old Testament is the only canon of Christians, or that the allegorical sense is the only sense of prophecies intended by our Saviour and his apostles. And whereas his

answerers had urged, that though most of the prophecies applied in the New Testament to our Lord Jesus Christ were literally fulfilled in him, yet some particular passages might be used only in a way of illustration and accommodation, and not as direct proofs; he sets himself, as his manner is, with a mighty pomp of quotations, to show the absurdity of supposing, that the apostles' method of citing prophecies was nothing but a mere accommodation of phrases, as if his adversaries had held, that all the passages cited in the New Testament from the Old were applied only by way of accommodation, which not one of them ever asserted. He puts on an appearance of answering what the bishop had alleged concerning the general and constant tradition, which had obtained among the Jews with regard to the Messiah; and he considers the twelve prophecies that learned writer had produced, as literally fulfilled in the Messiah. But any one that will take the pains to compare what he hath here offered with the book he pretends to answer, will find how little he has been able to say that is really to the purpose, and how far he has been from invalidating the proofs which had been brought. He often slips over the most material things that had been urged, and as the bishop afterwards complained, takes no more notice of them than if he had not read them. If he can but find a single passage in any Jewish or Christian writer, though but a modern one, and contrary to the general consent of interpreters, this is laid hold on to set aside the bishop's interpretation, and to show that the Jews did not generally understand a prophecy of the Messiah, or apply it to him, though clear evidence had been produced that they so applied it.

But there is no part of the *Literal Scheme*, &c. which the author has so much laboured, as that where he hath collected together all he could meet with against the antiquity and authority of the book of Daniel, and the prophecies contained there. This occasioned a second answer from the learned bishop, entitled, "A Vindication of the Defence of Christianity from the Prophecies of the Old Testament," published in 1728, in which he hath largely and very solidly vindicated the antiquity and authority of the book of Daniel, and the application of the prophecies there contained to the Messiah, against the author's objections; and hath also fully obviated whatsoever he had farther advanced against the antiquity and universality of the tradition and expectation among the Jews concerning the Messiah. The learned Dr. Rogers had before this published his very valuable sermons on the *Necessity of divine Revelation, and the Truth of the Christian Religion*. "To which is prefixed a preface, with some remarks on a late book, entitled, *The Scheme of Literal Prophecy considered*," London, 1727, 8vo. Soon after which, there came out an ingenious pamphlet, entitled, "The true Grounds of the Expectation of the Messiah," in two letters by *Philaletes*, London, 1727, said to be written by Dr. Sykes. Dr. Bullock also appeared again to great advantage in this controversy, in a treatise entitled, "The Reasoning of Christ and his Apostles

vindicated, in two parts. 1. A Defence of the Argument from Miracles, proving the Argument from Prophecy not necessary to a rational Defence of our Religion. 2. A Defence of the Argument from Prophecy, proving the Christian Scheme to have a rational Foundation upon the Prophecies of the Old Testament," in answer to a book intitled, "The Scheme of Literal Prophecy considered," London, 1728, 8vo. In this book, Dr. Bullock finds great fault with our author's way of managing the argument; he observes, that he has not only "raked together the unguarded expressions of ingenious men, but by altering, adding to, and curtailng passages referred to, and by other disingenuous methods unbecoming a man of honour and sincerity, wresteth them to purposes apparently contrary to their true import." And yet no man had raised a louder outcry against the clergy, for abusing, corrupting, and mangling of authors to serve their own purposes, than this gentleman had done in his *Discourse of Freethinking*. The bishop, in his *Vindication*, makes the same complaint against him; so does Dr. Samuel Chandler, who published, on this occasion, a judicious "Vindication of the Antiquity and Authority of Daniel's Prophecies, and their Application to Jesus Christ;" in answer to the objections of the author of the *Scheme of Literal Prophecy considered*, London, 1728, 8vo. About the same time was published, "Christianity the Perfection of all Religion, natural and revealed; wherein some of the principal Prophecies relating to the Messiah in the Old Testament are shown to belong to him in the literal Sense, in Opposition to the Attempts of the Literal Scheme," &c. by Thomas Jeffreys, London, 1728. I shall conclude this letter with observing, that this attack against Christianity, though carried on with great art as well as malice, produced this advantage, that it gave occasion to a full and accurate examination into the nature, design, and extent of many of the Old Testament prophecies, and to the placing some difficult passages in a clearer light.

LETTER VIII.

Mr. Woolston's Discourses on the Miracles of our Saviour.—Under pretence of standing up for the allegorical Sense of Scripture, he endeavours absolutely to destroy the Truth of the Facts recorded in the Gospels.—His disingenuous Representation of the Sense of the Fathers on this Head, and his false Quotations.—He charges the Accounts given of Christ's Miracles as absurd, false, and incredible.—His gross and profane Buffoonry, and base Reflections on the Character of our Saviour; and yet he pretends a Zeal for his Honour and Messiahship.—A Specimen of his way of Reasoning with regard to several of Christ's Miracles, and his Resurrection.—Many good Answers published against him.

SIR,

I HAVE already taken notice of several attempts, which were manifestly intended to subvert the truth and divine authority of our

holy religion. The last that was mentioned was, that of the author of the *Discourse of the Grounds and Reasons of the Christian Religion*, who, under pretence of setting Christianity on a sure and solid foundation, had endeavoured to show that it hath no foundation at all; that it is founded wholly on the Old Testament prophecies, taken not in a literal, but merely in an allegorical, i. e. as he plainly designed it, in a false sense, contrary to the original intention of the prophecies themselves. In opposition to him it was clearly shown, that many of the Old Testament prophecies are justly applied to our Saviour in their proper and literal sense. Besides which it was urged, that there were other solid proofs of Christianity, particularly that of our Saviour's miracles, and his resurrection from the dead; and the illustrious attestations given to him from heaven, were evident proofs of his divine mission. And now, under pretence of acting the part of a moderator in this controversy, a new antagonist arose, Mr. Woolston, who endeavoured to allegorize away the miracles of our Saviour, as Mr. Collins had done the prophecies. This he first attempted in a pamphlet, intitled, *A Moderator between an Infidel and an Apostate*; and in two *Supplements* to it; and afterwards more largely in six Discourses on the miracles of our Saviour, which were successively published at different times, in the years 1727, 1728, and 1729; the design of all which is to show, that the accounts of the great facts recorded in the gospels are to be understood wholly in a mystical and allegorical sense; and that, taken in the literal and historical sense, they are false, absurd, and fictitious. This attempt he hath carried on with greater rudeness and insolence than any of those that appeared before him. The Earl of Shaftesbury, even where he unhappily sets up ridicule as the test and criterion of truth, expresseth his disapprobation of *scurrilous buffoonry, gross raillery, and an illiberal kind of wit*. And if there ever was any performance to which these characters might be justly applied, it is this of Mr. Woolston. The same noble writer observes, that to *manage a debate so as to offend the public ear, is to be wanting in that respect that is due to the society;—and that what is contrary to good breeding is, in this respect, as contrary to liberty*. If we are to judge of Mr. Woolston's writings by this rule, they are as inconsistent with a just liberty, as they certainly are with good breeding and decency.

There are two ways by which he endeavours to answer the design he hath in view. The one is, by showing that the literal sense of our Saviour's miracles is denied by the most ancient and venerable writers of the Christian church; the other is, by showing the absurdity of the accounts given in the gospels, taken in the literal sense. With regard to the first of these, he hath with great pomp produced many testimonies of the fathers, for whom he professeth the profoundest veneration; and, by a strange disingenuity, endeavoureth to represent them as absolutely denying the facts themselves related in the gospel; because, according to a custom which then obtained, they added to the literal, a spiritual and allegorical sense,

and took occasion from thence to make pious allusions. He pretendeth, that if we will adhere to the fathers, *the gospel is in no sort a literal story*; and that *the history of Jesus's life is only an emblematical representation of his spiritual life in the souls of men*. But it is certain, and was evidently proved by his learned answerers, that in giving the allegorical and mystical sense, the fathers first supposed the literal sense, and the historical truth of the facts, and upon them built their allegorical interpretations. It is acknowledged, that in these they often exceeded just bounds, and too much indulged the vagaries of a pious fancy; but to pretend, that they intended to deny that the facts recorded by the evangelists were really done, is one of the most confident impositions that were ever put upon mankind; and it is not to be doubted, but the author himself was sensible of this. Many glaring instances of unfairness and disingenuity in his quotations from the fathers were plainly proved upon him. It was shown, that he hath quoted books generally allowed to be spurious, as the genuine works of the fathers; and hath, by false translations and injurious interpolations, and foisting in of words, done all that was in his power to pervert the true sense of the authors he quotes; and that sometimes he interprets them in a manner directly contrary to their own declared sense, in the very passages he appeals to, as would have appeared, if he had fairly produced the whole passage.

It is not to be wondered at, that an author who was capable of such a conduct should stick at no methods to expose and misrepresent the accounts given by the evangelists of our Saviour's miracles. Under pretence of shewing the absurdity of the literal and historical sense of the facts recorded in the gospels, he hath given himself an unrestrained license in invective and abuse. The books of the evangelists, and the facts there related; he hath treated in a strain of low and coarse buffoonery, and with an insolence and scurrility that is hardly to be paralleled. He asserts, that they are full of *improbabilities, incredibilities, and gross absurdities*: that they are like "Gulliverian tales of persons and things, that out of the romance never had a being: that neither the fathers, nor the apostles, nor Jesus himself, meant that his miracles should be taken in the literal, but in the mystical and parabolical sense." And he expressly declares, that "if Jesus's miracles, literally taken, will not abide the test of sense and reason, they must be rejected, and Jesus's authority along with them."* He casteth several reflections on our blessed Lord, so base and scurrilous, that they cannot but be extremely offensive to a Christian ear; and which even sober heathens, many of whom regarded him as a person of great wisdom and virtue, would have been ashamed of; and yet this author charges the bishop of London with *ignorance or malice*, in representing him as *a writer in favour of infidelity*. He declares, that he is the "farthest of any man from being engaged in the cause of infidels or

* Discourse IV. p. 16.

deists;" and that he "writes not for the service of infidelity, which has no place in his heart, but for the honour of the holy Jesus, and in defence of Christianity." The like declarations he frequently repeateth. He ends his fourth discourse on our Saviour's miracles with avowing, that his design in these his discourses is "the advancement of the truth and of the Messiahship of the holy Jesus, to whom be glory for ever, Amen." He concludes his sixth discourse in the same manner, and expresses himself in his first and second Defence to the like purpose. Any one that compares these declarations with the whole strain of his discourses, will be apt to entertain the worst opinion imaginable of the writer's sincerity; and the most extensive charity will scarce be able to acquit him from the most gross and shocking prevarication.

But not to insist farther on this, one would have expected, that, after all the clamours he hath raised against the evangelical accounts of our Saviour's miracles, he should have had some formidable objections to produce; and yet, when stripped of the ridiculous turn he hath given them, they are, except some few difficulties, which are far from being new, and have been solidly answered, contemptibly vain and trifling. It is an objection he frequently repeats against what we are told concerning our Saviour's curing the diseased, the blind, the lame, &c. that the evangelists have not given us an exact account of the nature and symptoms of their distempers, as physicians and surgeons would have done, that we might know whether the cure was supernatural. And if they had done this, it would, no doubt, have been improved as a strong presumption of art and contrivance in the relaters, and as no way consistent with that honest, artless simplicity of narration, for which the evangelists are so remarkable. With regard to the cure of the man that was born blind, he finds fault that our Saviour did not cure him with a word speaking, which he says would have been a great and real miracle; and if he had done so, as he did in several other cases, this writer would have been as far from believing it as before. He will have it, that, under pretence of anointing the blind man's eyes with clay and spittle, Jesus made use of a sovereign balsam which wrought the cure; and supposes, in direct contradiction to the whole story, that his blindness was only a slight disorder of the eyes, which was wearing away with age, and that therefore the restoring him to his sight was no miracle at all, though the man himself, his parents, and friends that had known him all along, and the chief priests and pharisees, who made a strict enquiry into the case, could not help acknowledging that it was a very great one. Our Saviour's discovering to the Samaritan woman the secrets of her past life, which convinced her of his being a prophet, and from whence he took occasion to give her the most excellent instructions concerning the nature of true religion, passes with this writer for the trick of a *fortune-teller*. And whereas it appeareth from the account given by the evangelist, that the Samaritans looked for the Messiah under the idea of a divine teacher, and the *Saviour of the*

world, he represents it as if they expected the Messiah, not as a *prince* or a *prophet*, but a *conjurer* only. Several other instances might be produced, in which he addeth or varieth circumstances, and altereth the story as recorded by the evangelists, that he may take occasion to place it in a ridiculous light.

It is a remarkable concession which is made by him in the beginning of his fifth Discourse, that "it will be granted on all hands, that the restoring a person indisputably dead to life is a stupendous miracle; and that two or three such miracles, well-attested and credibly reported, are enough to conciliate the belief, that the author of them was a divine agent, and vested with the power of God."* Three miracles of this kind are recorded in the gospel to have been wrought by Jesus: viz. his raising Jairus's daughter, the widow's son at Naim, and Lazarus. And what has our author to object against these accounts? He objects in general against them all, that the persons raised ought to have been magistrates or persons of eminence. But the raising such persons would not have been so agreeable to the rest of our Saviour's conduct and character, who shunned what might have the appearance of ostentation, or be looked upon as an attempt to make an interest with the great. He farther objects, that the persons that were raised should have told what they had seen and done in the separate state. And if the evangelists had been romantic writers that wanted to amuse their readers with strange stories, they might probably have inserted some things of this kind into their accounts; but they confined themselves to the plain facts, as far as they knew them, which they have related with the greatest simplicity. He objects particularly against the story of raising Jairus's daughter, because she was but a *girl of twelve years old*; as if the raising one of that age was not as great a miracle as if she had been twenty. He next pretends that she was only *in a fit*; though all the persons about her, and her nearest relations, were satisfied that she was dead, and were making the usual preparations for her funeral. It is enough with him to discredit the story of raising the widow's son at Naim from the dead, that he was not a person of importance, but a youth, and the son of a poor woman; and he has with great sagacity discovered, that Jesus's accidental meeting the corpse, and touching the bier, is a plain proof that it was all a contrivance between him and the young man. To mention such objections is to confute them. But perhaps he hath stronger ones to produce against the story of the resurrection of Lazarus, which he pronounceth to be such a *texture of folly and fraud, as is not to be equalled in all romantic history*; and yet the principal objection he hath to offer is no more than this, that three of the evangelists have not mentioned it. But no argument can be drawn against the truth of the fact from their silence, since it is evident that they never designed or pretended to record all the remarkable miracles which our Saviour wrought; and

* Discourse V. p. 3.

St. John, who was an eye-witness, and who chiefly taketh notice of the things which the others had omitted, hath given us a very distinct and particular account of it. Among the circumstances which Mr. Woolston looks upon to be sufficient to set aside that story, one is, that we are told, *Jesus wept*. This was a sign of his great humanity, and the goodness of his temper; but our author thinks *a stoical apathy* would have become him better. Another is, that Jesus called to Lazarus with *a loud voice to come forth*; which was certainly very proper, that all who were present might attend and observe. And what is very odd, he makes Lazarus's being *bound in grave clothes*, and having his *head bound about with a napkin*, to be a very suspicious sign that he had not been really dead; and very wisely has found out, that Lazarus by a concert with Jesus, who was at a considerable distance when it happened, contrived to be buried, and lie in the grave four days, that Jesus might have the honour of seeming to raise him up from the dead. And because the Jews took counsel to kill Jesus, and he withdrew for a while from their rage, this is produced as a proof, that the Jews knew he was guilty of a fraud, and that he himself was conscious of it; whereas it appears from the whole account, that their taking counsel to put him to death was owing to their being sensible of the greatness of the miracle, and that it was too evident to be denied, and was likely to draw the people after him.

The objections which he makes in the person of a Jewish rabbi, against the evangelical story of our Lord's resurrection, which he declareth to be a *complication of absurdities, incoherences, and contradictions*, are equally frivolous. He insinuates, that the guards set by the Roman governor, at the desire of the chief priests, to watch the body of Jesus, suffered themselves to be bribed or intoxicated by the disciples; in which he is more quick-sighted than the chief priests and pharisees, whom it more nearly concerned, who, it is plain, suspected no such thing; in which case, instead of excusing, they would have endeavoured to get them severely punished. But what he seems to lay the principal stress upon is, a supposed covenant between the chief priests and Jesus's disciples, that the seal with which the stone of the door of the sepulchre was sealed should not be broken, till the three days were entirely passed; and that therefore the rolling away the stone from the sepulchre, and breaking the seal before the three days were ended, was a breach of that covenant, and a proof of an imposture. A most extraordinary conceit this! as if the rulers of the Jews would have troubled themselves to enter into a concert with Jesus's disciples, whom they hated and despised, and who at that time had hid themselves for fear of them, and were fled; or as if such a covenant could bind our Lord from rising when he judged fittest. As to that part of the objection which supposes, that he ought to have lain in the grave, according to his own prediction, three whole days and nights, it proceeds from a real or affected ignorance of the Jewish phraseology. This is a modern objection. The ancient enemies of Chris-

tianity did not pretend that Jesus rose before the time prefixed; for they very well knew that, according to a way of speaking usual among the Jews and other nations, his rising again on any part of the third day was sufficient to answer the prediction. This matter was set in a clear light in *The Trial of the Witnesses*, yet the objection was again repeated by the author of the *Resurrection of Jesus considered*, and was so fully exposed by the learned answerers, that one would hope we shall hear no more of it.*

Mr. Woolston makes it also a great objection against the truth of Jesus's resurrection, that he did not shew himself after his death to the chief-priests and rulers of the Jews. And indeed there is no objection with which the deistical writers have made a greater noise than this. It is urged particularly by the author of the *Resurrection of Jesus considered*; but, above all, Mr. Chubb has insisted upon it at large, and with great confidence, in his posthumous works, vol. i. p. 337, and seq. And yet good reasons may be assigned, why it was not proper that it should be so. Considering the cruel and inveterate malice they had shewn against Jesus, and the power of their prejudices, there is no likelihood of their submitting to the evidence. They had attributed his miracles to the power of the devil; and his raising Lazarus from the dead, of which they had full information, only put them upon attempting to destroy him. Instead of being wrought upon by the testimony of the soldiers, they endeavoured to stifle it. And if Jesus had shewn himself to them after his passion, and they had pretended it was a spectre or a delusion, and had still refused to acknowledge him after this, it would have been insisted upon as a strong presumption against the reality of his resurrection. But let us suppose that Jesus had not only appeared to them after his resurrection, but that they themselves had acknowledged the truth of his resurrection and ascension, and had owned him for their Messiah, and brought the body of the Jewish nation into it; can it be imagined that they who now make that objection would have been satisfied? It may rather be supposed, that those great men's coming into it would have been represented as a proof that all was artifice and imposture; and that the design was to spirit up the people against the Roman government, and carry on some political scheme, under pretence of restoring the kingdom to Israel. The whole would have been treated as a national Jewish affair, a thing concerted between the chief priests and the disciples; and there would have been a greater clamour raised against it than there is now. I am persuaded that the evidence which was actually given of Christ's resurrection by the apostles and disciples of Christ, in opposition to their own prejudices, and to the authority and power of the Jewish chief priests and rulers, and notwithstanding the persecutions to which their testimony to it exposed them, was much more convincing and less

* See the Evidence of the Resurrection cleared, p. 64, &c. and Mr. Chandler's Witnesses of the Resurrection re-examined, p. 14—19.

exceptionable than it would have been, if they had had the favour and countenance of the chiefs of the Jewish nation, or of those persons who were of the greatest interest and authority among them.

What has been mentioned may serve for a specimen of this writer's objections against the accounts of our Saviour's miracles recorded in the evangelists; and he might by the same way of management, by arbitrary suppositions, and adding or altering circumstances as he judged proper, have proved the most authentic accounts in the Greek or Roman history to be false and incredible. He might at the same rate of arguing have undertaken to prove, that there was no such person as Jesus Christ, or his apostles, or that they were only allegorical persons, and that Christianity was never planted or propagated in the world at all.

This extraordinary writer thought fit to begin his second Discourse on our Saviour's miracles, with boasting, that none of the clergy had published their exceptions against what he had offered in his first; and that this shewed that his cause was just, and his arguments and authorities unanswerable. But he did not continue long unanswered; many learned adversaries soon appeared against him, but they were far from imitating him in his low and scurrilous way of treating the subject. They shewed themselves as much superior in the temper, calmness, and solid and serious manner of treating the argument, as in the goodness of their cause. They considered even his most trifling objections, and whatever things he had urged, that had any real or seeming difficulty in them (and some such things must be expected in ancient writings, which relate to times and customs different from ours, and especially with regard to facts of an extraordinary nature), were coolly examined, and fully obviated.

The late worthy bishop of London, Dr. Gibson, published on this occasion an excellent pastoral letter, written, as all his are, with great clearness and strength. The learned and ingenious Dr. Zachary Pearce, now Lord Bishop of Rochester, published *The Miracles of Jesus Vindicated*, in four parts, which came out at different times in the year 1729, and were deservedly much esteemed. But the largest answer was that by Dr. Smallbrook, Lord Bishop of St. David's, in two volumes, 8vo. This learned work is intitled, "A Vindication of our Saviour's Miracles, in which Mr. Woolston's Discourses on them are particularly examined; his pretended Authority of the Fathers against the Truth of the literal Sense are set in a just Light, and his Objections, in point of Reason, answered"—London, 1729. There were other good answers published, which also took in the whole of Mr. Woolston's Discourses; such were Mr. Ray's "Vindication of our Saviour's Miracles," in two parts, the first published in 1727, the second in 1729; and Mr. Stevenson's "Conference on the Miracles of our Saviour," published in 1730, an ingenious and solid performance. Besides which there were several excellent pamphlets, that were designed to vindicate some particular miracles against Mr. Woolston's exceptions. Such

were Mr. Atkinson's "Vindication of the literal Sense of three Miracles of Christ—his turning Water into Wine—his whipping the Buyers and Sellers out of the Temple—and his exorcising the Devils out of two Men—against Mr. Woolston's Objections, in his first and second Discourses on the Miracles of our Saviour; in three Letters to a Friend," London, 8vo., 1729. Dr. Harris's two sermons on the "Reasonableness of believing in Christ, and the Unreasonableness of Infidelity; with an Appendix, containing brief remarks upon the case of Lazarus; relating to Mr. Woolston's fifth Discourse of Miracles," London, 8vo., 1729. That discourse of Mr. Woolston was also animadverted upon by Mr. Simon Brown, in a treatise written with great smartness and spirit, intitled, "A fit Rebuke to a ludicrous Infidel, in some Remarks on Mr. Woolston's fifth Discourse on the Miracles of our Saviour; with a Preface concerning the Prosecution of such Writers by the Civil Power," London, 8vo., 1732. The following tracts also deserve special notice, as being written with great clearness and judgment. "A Vindication of three of our blessed Saviour's Miracles, in Answer to the Objections of Mr. Woolston's fifth Discourse on the Miracles of our Saviour," by Nathaniel Lardner, now Dr. Lardner, London, 1729. "A Defence of the Scripture History, as far as it concerns the resurrection of Jairus's Daughter, the Widow's Son at Naim, and Lazarus; in answer to Mr. Woolston's fifth Discourse," London, 1729. This is said to have been written by Dr. Henry, who afterwards published "A Discourse on our Saviour's miraculous Power of Healing; in which the six Cases excepted against by Mr. Woolston are considered; being a Continuation of the Defence of Scripture History," London, 1730. And as Mr. Woolston had bent his efforts with a particular virulence against the resurrection of our blessed Lord, this was fully and distinctly considered, especially in a pamphlet written by Dr. Sherlock, Lord Bishop of London, entitled, "The Trial of the Witnesses of the Resurrection of Jesus," London, 1729, which has been very justly admired for the polite and uncommon turn, as well as the judicious way of treating the subject. There were also published on the same occasion, "An Answer to the Jewish Rabbi's two Letters against Christ's Resurrection, and his raising Lazarus from the dead; with some observations on Mr. Woolston's own Reflections on our Saviour's conduct," London, 1729. "An impartial Examination and full Confutation of the Arguments brought by Mr. Woolston's pretended Rabbi against the Truth of our Saviour's Resurrection," London, 8vo., 1730. And two Discourses by Dr. Wade; the first, "An Appeal to the Miracles of Jesus Christ for his Messiahship;" the second, "A Demonstration of the Truth and Certainty of his Resurrection from the dead," London, 8vo., 1729. Among the writers that appeared against Mr. Woolston, Mr. Joseph Hallet ought not to be forgotten, on the account of his judicious "Discourse of the Reality, Kinds, and Numbers of our Saviour's Miracles, occasioned by Mr. Woolston's six Discourses;" this was

published in the second volume of his notes and discourses, 8vo., 1732. The last I shall mention is Mr. Stackhouse, who published "A fair State of the Controversy between Mr. Woolston and his Adversaries," London, 8vo., 1730; in which he hath given a very clear account of Mr. Woolston's objections, and the answers that were returned by those who had written against him.

Mr. Woolston published what he called, "A Defence of his Discourses on the Miracles of our Saviour, against the Bishop of London and St. David's, and his other Adversaries," in two pamphlets; the first was published, London, 1729; the second in 1730. These are very trifling performances, in which there is a continued strain of low drollery, but little that has a show of reason and argument, in answer to what had been strongly urged against him. He has scarce attempted to take notice of the instances which had been brought to show his great dishonesty in his quotations, and his gross falsifications of the fathers and ancient writers. This seems to have given him very little disturbance, though if he had any regard to his own reputation, it highly concerned him to clear himself, if he had been able to do it, from so heavy a charge.

But I believe you will be of opinion, that I have dwelt long enough upon such an author, though he himself boasts of *cutting out such a piece of work for our Boylean lectures, as shall hold them tug* (as he politely expresses it), *so long as the ministry of the letter and a hireling priesthood last.**

LETTER IX.

The present Age a happy Time of Liberty; but that Liberty greatly abused.—An Account of Dr. Tindal's *Christianity as old as the Creation*.—He pretends a great Regard for the Christian Religion, yet uses his utmost Efforts to discard all Revelation, in general, as entirely useless and needless; and particularly sets himself to expose the Revelation contained in the holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testament.—The high Encomiums he bestows on the Religion of a Deist, and on his own Performance.—Observations upon his Scheme.—It is shown to be absurd and inconsistent.—What he offers concerning the absolute universal Clearness of the Law of Nature to all Mankind, contrary to plain undeniable Fact and Experience.—His Scheme really less favourable to the Heathens than that of the Christian Divines.—An Account of the Answers published against him.

I BELIEVE, Sir, you will agree with me, that never had any nation a fuller enjoyment of liberty than we have had since the Revolution. What Tacitus celebrates as the felicity of the times of Trajan, "that men might think as they pleased, and speak as they thought," may be more justly applied to our own. *Rara temporum felicitate, ubi sentire quæ velis, et quæ sentias dicere licet.*† The noble author

* See his fifth Discourse on Miracles, p. 65, 66.

† Tacit. Hist. l. i. in præm.

of the *Characteristics* is pleased to mention it to the honour of the heathen world in ancient Greece and Rome, that "visionaries and enthusiasts were tolerated; and on the other side, philosophy had as free a course, and was permitted as a balance against superstition. Thus matters were happily balanced; reason had fair play; learning and science flourished."^{*} It would be no hard matter to show that this representation is not altogether just; for, not to mention the case of Socrates and others, it is capable of a clear proof, that though they might bear with the disputes among the several sects of philosophers in their schools, yet they would not suffer the established religion of the state to be called in question, and were ready to punish those that opposed it, of which they gave the most sanguinary proofs when Christianity appeared. But what his Lordship has said of those heathen times, the felicity of which he so much extols, is undoubtedly true of ours. Visionaries and enthusiasts are not persecuted, but tolerated; philosophy has a free course; reason has fair play; learning and science have greatly flourished. Nor can any age or country be mentioned, in which men have had a greater freedom of openly declaring their sentiments, either with regard to civil or religious matters. This is our privilege and our glory; but the greatest advantages are capable of being perverted through the corruption of mankind. Liberty, which, rightly improved, is the best friend to truth and to pure and undefiled religion, is often abused to a boundless licentiousness. Of this we have had many instances; but in nothing has it more remarkably appeared, than in the open repeated attempts that have been made against all revealed religion. It cannot be pretended, that the adversaries of Christianity have not been at liberty to produce their strongest objections against it. They have not only offered whatsoever they were able in a way of reason and argument, but they have in many instances given a loose to the most offensive ridicule and reproach; and if they have frequently thought fit to cover their attempts with a pretended regard for Christianity, we may safely affirm, that it has not been so much out of fear of punishment, as that under that disguise they might the better answer the end they had in view, and give religion a more deadly wound as pretended friends, than they could as avowed adversaries. This advantage however hath arisen from it, that it hath given occasion to many noble defences of Christianity, and to the clearing various difficulties, and placing the excellence and evidences of our holy religion in the strongest and most convincing light.

The attacks against Christianity, of which I have taken notice in my former letters, seemed for some time to have been carried on almost without intermission. Animated with a strange kind of zeal, the enemies of revelation were unwearied in their endeavours to subvert it. When repelled in one attempt, they were not discouraged, but renewed it in another form. Of this we now are going

* *Characteristics*, vol. i. p. 18.

to have a fresh instance. Woolston's attempt was so conducted as to raise a kind of horror and just indignation in all that had not utterly extinguished all remaining regard to the religion in which they were baptized. Such outrageous abuse, such undisguised reproach cast upon our blessed Saviour and his holy gospel, such coarse ridicule and contempt, though it did a great deal of mischief among men of empty and vicious minds, with whom scurrilous jest and gross buffoonery, especially when levelled against things sacred, passeth for wit and argument; yet was apt rather to create disgust in persons of any degree of taste or refinement. It was therefore judged necessary, that Christianity should be attacked in a more plausible way, which had a greater appearance of reasoning, and might be better fitted to take with persons of a more rational and philosophic turn. This seems to have been the design of Dr. Tindal's laboured performance, intitled, "*Christianity as old as the Creation; or, the Gospel a Republication of the Law of Nature;*" which was first published in 4to, London, 1730, and afterwards in 8vo. One would have been apt to expect from the title of this book, that he should have set himself to prove, that the gospel is perfectly agreeable to the law of nature; that it hath set the great principles of natural religion in the clearest light; and that it was designed to publish and confirm it anew, after it had been very much obscured and defaced through the corruption of mankind. And if so, this author, who every-where professeth such a high esteem for the genuine law and religion of nature, ought to have done all in his power to recommend the gospel-revelation to the esteem and veneration of mankind, and to have represented it as a great advantage to those that enjoy it, and a signal instance of the divine goodness: And what would induce one farther to think that this was his view, he expressly declareth, that Christianity is the *external*, as natural religion is the *internal revelation of the same unchangeable will of God*, and that they differ only in the manner of their being communicated; and he proposeth greatly to *advance the honour of external revelation*, by showing *the perfect agreement there is between that and internal revelation*. He professeth to agree with bishop Chandler, that "*Christianity itself, stripped of the additions that policy, mistake, and the circumstances of time have made to it, is a most holy religion; and that all its doctrines plainly speak themselves to be the will of an infinitely wise and God.*"* Accordingly he honoureth himself and his friends with the title of *Christian Deists*.

But whosoever closely and impartially examineth his book will find, that all this plausible appearance and pretended regard to Christianity is only intended as a cover to his real design, which was to set aside all revealed religion, and entirely to destroy the authority of the Scriptures. Others have attacked particular parts of the Christian scheme, or of its proofs. But this writer has endeavoured

* Christianity as old as the Creation, p. 382. edit. 8vo.

to subvert the very foundation of it, by showing, that there neither is nor can be any external revelation at all, distinct from what he calls *the internal revelation of the law of nature in the hearts of all mankind*: that such external revelation is absolutely needless and useless; that the original law and religion of nature is so perfect, that nothing can possibly be added to it by any subsequent external revelation whatsoever; nor can God himself lay any new commands upon us, or institute any positive precepts, additional to the immutable eternal law of nature, without the imputation of erecting an unreasonable tyranny over his creatures. And as the religion and law of nature is absolutely perfect, so it always was and is clear and obvious to all mankind, even to those of the meanest capacity; so clear that it is impossible to be rendered more plain to any man by any external revelation, than it is to all men without it; that therefore all pretences to such revelation are only owing to enthusiasm or imposture; that reason and external revelation are inconsistent; and to be governed by the authority of such revelation is really to renounce our reason, and to give up our understandings to implicit faith; that this hath been the source of all the superstitions and corruptions which have prevailed among mankind; and that therefore the best thing that can be done for them is to engage them to throw off all regard to revelation, and to *adhere to the pure simple dictates of the light of nature*.

And as he thus endeavoureth to set aside all external supernatural revelation as needless and useless, and all pretences to it as vain and groundless; so he particularly setteth himself to expose the revelation contained in the holy scriptures of the Old and New Testament. He attempteth to invalidate the original proofs on which the authority of that revelation is founded, and particularly that which is drawn from the miracles that attested it; and he also taketh pains to prove, that we cannot possibly have any assurance, that this revelation is transmitted to us in a manner which may be safely depended upon. He examineth the revelation itself, and endeavoureth to show, that it is uncertain and obscure; that its precepts are delivered in a loose, general, undetermined manner, so as to be incapable of giving clear directions to the bulk of mankind; that the *keys of solution* necessary for understanding the Scriptures, are what the people are wholly unacquainted with; that, far from being of use as a rule to direct men in faith and practice, the Scriptures are only fit to perplex and misinform them; that they tend to give them very wrong and unworthy apprehensions of the Deity, and the duty they owe him; and that there are many things either commanded or approved there, which are apt to lead men astray in relation to the duties they owe to one another. He farther endeavoureth to show, that there is a contrast and opposition between the parts of this revelation, particularly between the Old Testament and the New. And it may be said upon the whole, that he hath spared no pains to rake together whatsoever he thought might be capable of exposing the Scriptures, or the Christian religion.

He concludes his book with arguing against the Christian revelation, from its having not been universal in all times and places, and from the corruptions of Christians.

Whilst he thus useth his utmost endeavours to expose Christianity as a falsely-pretended revelation, and as not only needless and useless, but of pernicious influence to mankind; he hath taken care to make the most advantageous representation of that scheme of natural religion he would recommend, and to show the great advantage the religion of the deists hath above that of the Christians. He sometimes speaks as if he thought the deists were infallibly guided, in making use of the reason God hath *given them, to distinguish religion from superstition*, so that they *are sure not to run into any errors of moment*.^{*} On the other hand, he honours all those that are for positive precepts in religion with the character of Demonists; and he represents divines in all ages, as, *for the most part, mortal enemies to the exercise of reason*, and even *below brutes*.

He ends his book as he had begun it, with a high panegyric upon his own performance; that by this attempt of his, "as nothing but rubbish is removed, so every thing is advanced which tends to promote the honour of God, and the happiness of human societies; that there is none who wish well to mankind, but must also wish his hypothesis to be true: and that there cannot be a greater proof of its truth, than that it is in all its parts so exactly calculated for the good of mankind, that either to add to it, or take from it, will be to their manifest prejudice; that it is a religion, as he hopes he has fully proved, founded upon such demonstrable principles, as are obvious to the meanest capacity, and most effectually prevents the growth both of scepticism and enthusiasm."

This may suffice to give a general idea of this boasted performance; but, if carefully examined, it will appear, that it is far from deserving the magnificent encomiums which he himself, and others who are favourers of the same cause, have so liberally bestowed upon it.

The scheme which this writer hath advanced, in order to show that there is no place or need for extraordinary revelation, dependeth chiefly upon two principles. The one is, that the law or religion of nature, obligatory upon all mankind, was from the beginning absolutely perfect and immutable, so that nothing could ever be added to it by any subsequent revelation. The other is, that this original law or religion of nature, comprehending all that men were from the beginning obliged to know, believe, profess, and practise, always was and still is so absolutely clear to all mankind, that it cannot be made clearer to any man by any external revelation, than it is to all men without it.

As to the first, he argues, that because God is unchangeable and absolutely perfect, therefore the religion he gave to man from the beginning must have been unchangeable and absolutely perfect; since nothing can proceed from a God of infinite perfection but what

^{*} Christianity as old as the Creation, p. 336. edit. 8vo.

is perfect; and that to suppose any subsequent addition to it, or alteration in it, is to suppose a change in God. But this will not answer the author's end, except he can prove that man is unchangeable too; and that the state of mankind must necessarily in all ages and seasons continue precisely the same that it was at the beginning of the world; for if there should be a change in the state and circumstances of mankind, *e. g.* from pure religion to superstition, and from a righteous and innocent to a guilty and corrupt state, God may see fit for excellent ends to lay new injunctions upon men, or make some farther discoveries of his will, suited to that alteration of circumstances. Nor would this show that he was changeable, but that he was most wise and good; and it would be a strange thing to affirm, that there could not possibly be any farther significations or discoveries of the divine will ever made by God himself, or any other thing required by him of men, or any additional help or advantages ever offered to them, in any supposable state or circumstances of mankind, but what were afforded and made from the beginning of the creation. This is a most absurd scheme; and if such a one had been advanced by the advocates for revelation, plentiful ridicule would have been bestowed upon it.

And it is equally absurd to pretend, as this writer doth, that God cannot at any time, or in any circumstance of things, enjoin positive precepts. If there be any external worship to be rendered to God at all (and this gentleman hath not thought fit openly to deny this), it would be the most unreasonable thing in the world to pretend, that he cannot institute or appoint what are the properest outward rites, or manner of performing that worship; especially since our author allows, that men themselves may appoint them; and to deny God the power which he alloweth to human magistrates in such a case, is abhorrent to the common sense of mankind; especially, considering that there is nothing in which men have more grossly erred, or as to which they stood in greater need of being properly directed, than in what relateth to religious worship. I would only farther observe, that this writer, in the whole dispute about positive precepts, always supposes *positive* and *arbitrary* precepts to be terms of the same signification; and by *arbitrary* he means things for which there is no reason at all. But this is a very unfair state of the case; for when we say God hath instituted positive precepts, though the matter of them be antecedently of an indifferent nature, it is still supposed there were wise reasons for enjoining them, and that, when enjoined, they are designed to be subservient to things of a moral nature, and to help forward the great ends of all religion. And that the positive precepts required in the Christian religion are such, and of an excellent tendency, hath been often clearly shown.

The other main principle of the author's scheme is, that that law or religion of nature, which he supposes to be absolutely perfect, always was and is so clear and obvious to all men, that there is not the least need or use of external revelation. This is what he hath greatly laboured; and if strong and confident assertions, frequently

repeated, may pass for proofs, he hath fully proved it. This part of his scheme coincides with that of Lord Herbert of Cherbury, who had represented the five great principles, in which he makes religion to consist, to be common notices, inscribed by a divine hand in the minds of all men, and universally acknowledged in all ages and nations. In like manner the author of *Christianity as old as the Creation* asserteth, that that religion, the perfection of which he so much extols, is *apparent to the whole world, to those of the meanest as well as highest capacity, and who are unable to read their mother tongue*. He expressly declareth, that God could *not more fully make known his will to all intelligent creatures than he hath done this way; no, not if he should miraculously convey the same ideas to all men*.^{*} He frequently speaks, as if the principles and obligations of natural religion were so clear, that men could not possibly mistake them; that all men see them at first view; and that the actual knowledge of the law of nature is naturally necessary, and inseparable from rational nature; so that it is as impossible for any reasonable creature to be ignorant of it, as it is for animals to live without the pulse of the heart and arteries.

This scheme, though it has been mightily applauded, is contrary to evident fact and experience; it supposeth the law or religion of nature, in its important principles and obligations, to be necessarily known to all mankind, and to be so clear that they cannot mistake it; when nothing is more certain and undeniable, than that they have mistaken it in very important instances, and that some of its main principles have been very much perverted and obscured. I shall not here repeat what was offered to this purpose in a former letter in my remarks on Lord Herbert's scheme, in which it is plainly proved, that men have fallen into a gross darkness with respect to some of those great principles in which that noble writer makes the true religion to consist; and that after all his efforts to the contrary, he hath found himself under a necessity of acknowledging it. The like acknowledgments the author of *Christianity as old as the Creation* hath been obliged to make. He himself in several parts of his book, though in plain contradiction to his own scheme, representeth almost all mankind in all ages, excepting the *Freethinking few*,[†] as having had very unworthy apprehensions of God, and wrong notions of the religion and law of nature. And no small part of his book is employed in inveighing against that superstition which he supposeth to have generally prevailed among mankind at all times, and which in his opinion is worse than Atheism; and consequently it must be acknowledged, even according to his own representation of the case, that men had fallen from the right knowledge of the religion of nature into great darkness and corruption. Cicero was so sensible of this, that, speaking of *some small sparks of virtue implanted in us*, he complaineth, that they are *soon extinguished by corrupt customs and opinions, so that the light of*

^{*} *Christianity as old as the Creation*, p. 22. edit. 8vo.

[†] *Ibid.* p. 149.

*nature no-where appears.** From whence he infers the great necessity and usefulness of philosophy to direct and assist us; and certainly this will conclude much more strongly for the necessity and usefulness of a divine revelation, which would be much more advantageous, and more to be depended on.

The argument therefore which Dr. Tindal urgeth from the supposed universal clearness of the law of nature, to show that there is no need or use for external revelation, falls to the ground. And indeed his way of arguing, if it proves any thing, equally proves, that all the writings of philosophers and moralists; all the instructions that have been ever given to mankind in matters of religion and morality, have been perfectly needless and of no use; and that consequently, all books which have been written on these subjects, the noblest in the world, and the best worth writing upon, must be discarded, as well as the scriptures; since all mankind have such a perfect knowledge of their duty, that they stand in no need of instruction or information. Yea, he sometimes represents it, as if instructing them by words tended only to mislead them from the knowledge of things. Thus, according to this goodly scheme, all men are to be left to what he calls the simple dictates of the light of nature, without any instruction at all; the certain consequence of which would be universal ignorance and barbarism. He often expresseth himself, as if he thought that all men have an equal knowledge of the law of nature; and indeed I do not see but that upon his scheme it must be so; yet at other times he supposeth the knowledge men have of it to be more or less clear according to the circumstances they are in; for he says, it is not necessary that all men *should have equal knowledge of it, but that all should have sufficient for the circumstances they are in;*† and talks of a man's *doing his best, according as his circumstances permit, to discover the will of God;* and of men's being *accepted, if they live up to their different degrees of light.* But though others may charitably make use of this way of speaking, it is hard to see how this writer can do it in consistency with his scheme; or how he can suppose any allowances to be made for involuntary errors: since according to his representation of the case, all errors in matters of religion or morals must be voluntary, in opposition to the clearest universal light. Though therefore he sets up for a mighty advocate for the heathen world, and blames the Christian divines for passing too severe a censure upon them, he himself must, if he be consistent, judge much more harshly of them than they: since his hypothesis quite destroys the plea with regard to the heathens, drawn from the great darkness and difficulties they laboured under; for he positively asserteth, that the law of nature is so clear, that *no well-meaning Gentile could be ignorant of it.*‡ He must therefore suppose all of them, who were involved in the general superstition and idolatry, which he himself acknowledged to be contrary to the law of nature, to have been

Tuscul. Quæst. lib. iii. in prose. † Christianity as old as the Creation, p. 4. edit. 8vo.

‡ Ibid. p. 33.

destitute of that sincerity, which he maketh to be the only title to happiness, and to the favour of God.

It may not be improper to observe farther, that though he often speaks of the law of nature, as if it were a system of principles and rules fixed and unalterable, to which nothing could ever be added, and in which nothing could ever be altered (which rules and principles he supposes to be necessarily known to all mankind), yet at other times he expresses himself, as if he thought there were no fixed unchangeable principles and rules of morality at all. The goodness of actions is, according to him, to be wholly measured by their tendency; and this is to be judged by the circumstances a man is under, which circumstances he represents as *continually changing*.* It appears from several passages, that, after all his magnificent talk of the perfection and immutability of the law of nature, all that he would have to be understood by it is only this, that it is the will of God that every man should act, according as the circumstances he is under point out his duty. This is the sole universal rule or standing law given to all mankind for their conduct, and by which they may know their duty in all cases whatsoever; as if it were sufficient to tell men, even the most illiterate, that they must act as the circumstances they are placed in do require, without any other or farther direction. But surely any one that knows the world and mankind must be sensible, that, if every man were to be left to himself, to find out what is good and fit for him to do, merely by what he apprehendeth to be most for his own benefit in the circumstances he is under, and to gratify his appetites and passions, as far as he himself thinketh to be most for his own advantage and happiness, without any other direction or law to restrain or govern him, it would soon introduce a very loose morality. I cannot help looking upon it to be a strange way of thinking, to imagine that it would be better for every man to be left thus to form a scheme of religion and morals for himself, than to have his duty urged and enforced upon him, by plain and express precepts, in a revelation confirmed by the authority of God himself.

As this book made a great noise, many good answers were returned to it. A second *pastoral Letter* was published on this occasion by the late bishop of London, which, like his former, comprised a great deal in a small compass, and was very well fitted to answer the end it was intended for, to be an antidote against the spreading infection of infidelity. Several other valuable treatises might be mentioned, such as, *The Argument set forth in a late Book intitled, "Christianity as old as the Creation," reviewed and confuted in several Conferences*, by Dr. Thomas Burnet. Dr. Waterland's *Scripture Vindicated*; which was particularly designed to vindicate the holy Scriptures, which this author had taken great pains to vilify and expose: a good account is here given of a great number of passages in the sacred writings, and his objections against

* Christianity as old as the Creation, p. 16. 317, 318.

them are fully obviated. Mr. Law's *Case of Reason, or Natural Religion, fairly and fully stated, in answer to a Book, entitled, "Christianity as old as the Creation."* Mr. Jackson's *Remarks on a Book, intitled, "Christianity as old as the Creation."* Dr. Stebbing's *Discourse, concerning the Use and Advantage of the Gospel-Revelation, in which are obviated the principal Objections contained in a Book, intitled, "Christianity as old as the Creation,"* London, 8vo. 1731. The same learned and judicious writer published another excellent tract against Dr. Tindal, intitled, *A Defence of Dr. Clarke's Evidences of Natural and Revealed Religion, in Answer to the fourteenth Chapter of a Book, intitled, "Christianity as old as the Creation,"* London, 8vo. 1731. Mr. Balguy, the worthy author of a *Letter to a Deist*, of which some notice was taken before in the account of the Earl of Shaftesbury's writings, published on this occasion *A second Letter to a Deist, concerning a late Book, intitled, "Christianity as old as the Creation;" more particularly that Chapter which relates to Dr. Clarke,* London, 8vo. 1731. And, several years after, he published a very valuable tract, which was particularly intended to defend the mediatorial scheme, against the objections which Dr. Tindal had advanced, intitled, *An Essay on Redemption, being the second Part of Divine Rectitude,* London, 8vo. 1741. To these ought to be added, a piece which has been deservedly much esteemed, written by the ingenious Mr. Anthony Atkey, though without his name, intitled, *The main Argument of a late Book, intitled, "Christianity as old as the Creation," fairly stated and examined; or, a short View of the whole Controversy,* London, 8vo, 1733. Besides these and other tracts that were published on this occasion, there were some large answers made to this book, of which I shall give a more particular account.

The first of them that I shall mention is intitled, "The Usefulness, Truth, and Excellency of the Christian Revelation, defended against the Objections contained in a late Book, entitled, 'Christianity as old as the Creation,'" by James Foster, afterwards Dr. Foster, London, 8vo. 1731. This is generally and justly acknowledged to be an ingenious performance, and written with great clearness of thought and expression. It is divided into five chapters. The first is designed to show the advantages of revelation in general, and particularly of the Christian; it is plainly proved, that whatever the power of reason may be supposed to be, if duly exercised and improved to the utmost, yet when the light of nature is darkened, and ignorance, idolatry, and superstition have overspread the world, which was undoubtedly the case when our Saviour appeared, an extraordinary revelation would be highly useful, and of great benefit to mankind. He then proceeds to consider what is the proper evidence of the truth and divinity of any particular revelation; and how those to whom it is given may be satisfied that it really came from God; and here it is shown, that miracles, when considered in conjunction with the good tendency and excellence of the doctrines, furnish a proper and sufficient evidence. In the second

chapter, he vindicates the conduct of God's providence in not making the Christian religion universally known to all nations, and in all times and ages : and proves, that this is analogous to the general course of providence both in the natural and moral world, and that it is consistent with the divine perfections, and consequently with the notion of its being a divine revelation. In the third chapter, which is the largest in the whole book, it is shown, that we have a sufficient probability, even at this distance, of the authenticity, credibility, and purity of the books of the New Testament ; and that the common people are able to judge of the truth and uncorruptedness of a traditional religion ; and a good answer is returned to the arguments drawn from the changes of language, the different use of words, and the style and phrase of Scripture, to prove it an obscure, perplexed, and uncertain rule. The fourth chapter contains a general defence of positive commands, which Dr. Tindal had urged as alone "sufficient to make all things else, that can be said in support of any revelation, totally ineffectual." It is proved, that they are not repugnant to reason, nor subversive of moral obligation, nor inconsistent with the wisdom, justice, and goodness of God ; and that instituted religion is not superstition, and, if rightly understood, has no more a tendency to superstition, than natural religion itself. And the fifth contains a particular vindication of the peculiar positive institutions of Christianity ; in which it is shown, that they are of excellent use for begetting and strengthening good moral habits, and for exciting and engaging men to a more diligent practice of moral duties.


Another answer, which particularly engaged the attention of the public, was that published by Dr. John Conybeare, rector of Exeter College, Oxford, late lord bishop of Bristol, viz. "A Defence of Revealed Religion, against the Exceptions of a late Writer, in his Book entitled 'Christianity as old as the Creation,' London, 1732." This book is divided into nine chapters. The first is designed by the acute and learned author to show, what we are to understand by the law or religion of nature, from what the obligation of it arises, and how far it extends. He shows, that the religion or law of nature does not take in every thing that is founded in the nature or reason of things, which seems to be the sense the author of *Christianity as old as the Creation* takes it in throughout his whole book, but only such a collection of doctrines and precepts, as is discernible to us in the use of our natural faculties ; and this, though founded in nature, becomes then only properly a law to us, when it is regarded as the will of God, the supreme legislator ; and our obligation to it, strictly speaking, is founded on the divine sanction of rewards and punishments. In the second chapter it is shown, that the law or religion of nature, in the sense already explained, is not absolutely perfect. Since the law of nature is only what men are capable of discerning, in the use of their natural faculties, it can be no more perfect than human reason. If the law of nature were absolutely perfect, it must have such a clearness as to the meaning

and authority of it, as can admit of nothing more in any possible circumstance; it must have such a strength of enforcement, that it cannot be heightened in any way whatsoever; and such an extent of matter, as to comprehend every thing that may be fit and proper to be known or done, and not to admit of any possible article to be added to it. And he plainly proves, that the law or religion of nature is not absolutely perfect in any of these respects. Chapter 3
third is intended to show, that the law of nature is not immutable, in such a sense especially as to be incapable of admitting any additional precepts. And here the question concerning positive precepts is accurately stated, and it is proved that God may appoint them; and an answer is returned to the author's objections to the contrary. In chapter fourth he enquires, whether natural and revealed religion be necessarily the same; and if not, wherein the proper distinction between them both doth consist. In the former chapter he had shown, that positive precepts might be given; here he carries it farther, and proves that some positive institutions might reasonably be expected, if ever God should reveal his will at all; both as tokens of his authority and our submission, and for the better order and decency of his worship, and the outward part of religion, and for the increase and advancement of inward piety. The same thing is urged from the concurrent sense of mankind in all ages, and under all religions. It is further shown, there are other things of higher importance in which natural and revealed religion differ, though they are not properly opposed to each other, *e. g.* with regard to principles and doctrines not discoverable by nature's light, or as to precepts which, though founded in the nature of things, yet are not certainly knowable in the use of our own reason. They also differ in point of clearness, and in efficacy. He instances particularly in the assurance given us of the pardon of sin, divine assistances, and the eternal retributions of a future state. Chapter fifth is designed to show, that a proper rule of life is not perfectly and easily discoverable by every man, even by those of the meanest capacity; and here it is evinced, that the author's own scheme of natural religion, which he pretends is so obvious to all mankind, is perplexed, obscure, and defective. In chapter sixth he inquires, whether a proper rule of life be more easily and perfectly discoverable by us in the use of our own reason, than the proof or meaning of a revelation can be. He shows the possibility of immediate revelation or inspiration, and that this gives the highest evidence; and that as to traditional revelation, though the evidence be not strictly demonstrative, it may be such as is sufficient to determine the assent of a sober thinking man; and he answers what the author had brought to prove, that the sense and meaning of such a revelation cannot be fixed and ascertained. Chapter seventh is designed to show, that a revelation is expedient, in order to a more easy, more perfect, and more general knowledge of the rule of life. This is distinctly evinced, both with regard to the wiser and better part of men, particularly the philosophers, and with respect to

persons of a lower rank and meaner abilities; and a good answer is made to what the author had urged, concerning the supposed inconsistency between our being governed by reason and revelation. In chapter eighth it is shown, that a revelation is expedient in order to enforce the general practice of the rule of life; that the mere pleasure of doing well, or a moral taste or sense, is not alone a sufficient balance for all the inconveniences of doing otherwise, amidst all the embarrassments of passion and temptation; nor if to this be added the civil sanctions of human authority, are these alone sufficient; for these are designed not so much to reward virtue, several of which do not come under the cognizance of human courts, as to punish crimes, and those only such as tend to the hurt of the society. Virtue can only be sufficiently enforced by sanctions established by God himself; and a revelation is expedient for that purpose. He concludes this chapter with giving a clear answer to two objections urged by the author; the one is, that if a revelation be expedient to be made to any, it must be equally expedient to be made to all, and at all times; the other is, that the revelation hath not in fact answered that purpose for which we affirm it to be expedient. The ninth, and last, chapter is intended to evince, that there is sufficient evidence of the reality of a revelation, especially of the Christian. He observes, that what is usually called the internal evidence of a revelation is not strictly and properly an evidence, but only a necessary condition or qualification of a true revelation; that external proof is the only direct evidence of a divine revelation; and this consisteth in miracles, as including prophecies, which may be considered as one sort of miracles. He shows what reason we have to believe, that the miracles recorded to have been done in favour of the Christian religion were really wrought; and that, supposing them to have been wrought, they were real and satisfactory proofs of a divine original.

There was another answer to Dr. Tindal's book, which I should not have chosen to take notice of, if the method I am in did not make it proper for me to do so, as I am sensible how hard it is for an author to speak of his own work, without offending his own modesty, or the delicacy of the reader. It was published at Dublin in two volumes, 8vo. in 1733, under the title of *An Answer to a late Book, intitled, "Christianity as old as the Creation;"* and was afterwards reprinted at London in 1740. It is much larger, and takes a wider compass than the other answers; and therefore the account here given of it will be also larger. It is divided into two parts: In the first part, which takes up the first volume, the author's account of the law of nature is considered, and his scheme is shown to be inconsistent with reason, and with itself, and of ill consequence to the interests of virtue, and to the good of mankind. This volume consisteth of eleven chapters, besides a large introduction, containing observations upon the author's spirit and design, and the way of reasoning made use of by him, and others of our modern deists. In the first chapter there is a general account of that writer's scheme,

which lies scattered in his book with little order or method, but is here brought together in one view, and the various and inconsistent senses, in which he takes the law of nature, examined. The second chapter relates to the vast extent he gives to the law of nature, as taking in whatsoever is founded in the nature of things. This is shown to be a strange hypothesis, when he is speaking of that law which he supposes to be known to all men, as if the whole reason and nature of things were open to every man; whereas, taken in this comprehensive view, it is only perfectly known to God himself. In the third and fourth chapters, what he hath offered to prove, that the religion or law of nature given to mankind at the beginning was so absolutely perfect that nothing could ever be afterwards added to it, and particularly that God could never institute any positive precepts, is distinctly considered; and it is proved, that God may both give men new laws suited to new circumstances of things, and may, if he seeth fit, institute positive precepts; and that these may answer very valuable ends; and particularly, that there were wise reasons for the positive institutions both of the Jewish and Christian religion. The fifth and sixth chapters relate to what our author had advanced concerning the universal clearness of the law of nature. It is shown at large, that it is not so obvious to all mankind, as to render an extraordinary revelation needless; that even as to those principles and duties which, absolutely speaking, are discoverable by human reason, revelation may be of great use to give a clearer and more certain knowledge of them, than the bulk of mankind, or even the wisest, could have without it. Besides which, there are several things of great importance to us to know, of which we could not have a certain assurance by the mere light of natural reason without revelation, and with regard to which, therefore, an express revelation from God would be of signal advantage, and ought to be received with great thankfulness; as particularly, with relation to the methods of our reconciliation with God when we have offended him, the terms and extent of forgiveness, and the nature, greatness, and duration of that reward, which it shall please God to confer on imperfect obedience. In the 7th and 8th chapters it is evinced, that this writer's scheme of natural religion is very defective; and that he giveth a wrong account of some of the main principles and duties of the law of nature; that he in effect depriveth it of its strongest sanctions; and that his scheme tendeth to take away the fear of God, and to make men easy in their sins. The ninth is designed to show, that his scheme is not fitted to answer the end he proposes by it, the delivering mankind from superstition and priestcraft; and that a strict adherence to the Christian revelation in its original purity would have a happier influence this way. The tenth chapter relates to those passages, in which he pretends to describe the religion of deists, and to draw a parallel between that and Christianity; and it is shown, that the advantages he would appropriate to deism do much more properly belong to the Christian religion, as laid down in the holy Scriptures. In the eleventh



chapter, his pretence of introducing a new and glorious state of things is examined; and the whole concludes with a brief representation of the pernicious tendency and manifold inconsistencies of the author's scheme.

In the second part, the authority and usefulness of the revelation contained in the sacred writings of the Old and New Testament, is asserted and vindicated against the objections and misrepresentations of this writer. This part is divided into sixteen chapters. The first contains some considerations concerning divine revelation in general, and what are the proper characters and evidences by which it may be known that such a revelation is really given; and that our being governed by the authority of such a revelation is not inconsistent with our being governed by reason, as this author has attempted to prove. The second chapter examines his objections against the characters of the first publishers and witnesses of the Jewish and Christian revelation; and it is shown, that we have all the assurance that we can reasonably desire, that they were neither imposed upon themselves, nor had a design to impose upon others; nor indeed, as things were circumstanced, had it in their power to do so, if they had designed it. In the third chapter his objections against the proof from miracles are considered. It is shown, that they are neither needless nor uncertain proofs; that there are certain marks and characters by which true divine miracles may be distinguished from those pretended to be wrought by imposture, or the agency of evil spirits; and that these characters are to be found in the miracles wrought in favour of the Jewish and Christian revelation. The design of the fourth chapter is to prove, that we have all the evidence that can be reasonably desired; that the revelation contained in the holy Scriptures, with an account of the facts and attestations by which that revelation was originally confirmed and established, is transmitted to us with such a degree of purity and certainty, as may be safely depended upon; and this is particularly shown with regard to the writings of the Old Testament, especially the law of Moses. In the fifth chapter, the authority and integrity of the sacred records of the New Testament are asserted and vindicated against the author's exceptions; and that we have both sufficient external proofs of their being safely transmitted to us, and that they carry in them the greatest internal evidences of genuine truth and uncorruptedness, that can be found in any writings whatsoever. The sixth chapter shows, that the wonderful success the gospel met with, and its speedy and general propagation, furnish a strong proof, as the case was circumstanced, of the truth of the facts on which it is founded. The following chapters are designed to consider his objections against Scripture, drawn from the nature and manner of the revelation there contained. And first, his attempt to prove, that it is uncertain and obscure, is obviated. What he urgeth to this purpose, concerning the ambiguity and uncertainty of words, concerning the scriptures being written in dead languages, and that the translations are not to be depended

on, is in the seventh chapter distinctly examined. The eighth relates to the keys of solution necessary for understanding the Scripture, which he pretends the people are wholly unacquainted with; and what he offers concerning the figurative language of Scripture, and the parables and proverbial expressions made use of by our Saviour, is considered. The ninth chapter makes it appear, that many of those passages, which this writer censures as obscure and apt to mislead the people, are so noble and of such excellent use, that a candid critic would have judged them worthy of admiration. In the tenth, an answer is given to his objections against the gospel precepts, drawn from their being delivered in a loose, general, and undetermined manner; and his argument for the obscurity of Scripture, from the divisions among Christians about the sense of it, and his pretence that this would infer the necessity of an infallible guide, is shown to be vain and inconclusive. The eleventh and twelfth chapters contain a distinct and particular examination of all those passages, whereby he pretends to prove, that the Scriptures tend to lead the people into wrong apprehensions of God, and into a wrong practice with relation to the duties they owe to one another. Chapter thirteenth considers what he has offered to show, that there is a contrast between the spirit of the Old and New Testament. In the fourteenth and fifteenth chapters, the Mosiac account of man's original dignity and the fall, and the Christian doctrine of a Mediator, are vindicated against this writer's exceptions. The last chapter contains an answer to two objections against Christianity, which have been often urged, and with which the author concludes his book: the one drawn from its not having been given and made known to all mankind in all ages and places from the beginning, the other drawn from the corruptions of Christians. And it is shown, that no argument will justly hold from either of these against the usefulness and divine authority of the Christian revelation.

There was also a solid and excellent answer to *Christianity as old as the Creation*, drawn up by the reverend Mr. Simon Brown, and which well deserves a particular notice. But I fear I may be thought to have been too tedious and particular already in the account that has been given of the answers to this book, though the opinion many have entertained of it, as if it were a very formidable attack upon Christianity, will I hope in some degree plead my excuse.

LETTER X.

Another Attempt against Christianity in Dr. Morgan's Book, called, *The Moral Philosopher*.—He seems to acknowledge the great Usefulness of Revelation, but leaves no Way of knowing when a Revelation is really given.—He discards all Authority, even a divine one, in Matters of Religion, and all Proof from Miracles and Prophecy.—His Invectives against the Law of Moses and the Prophets.—Though he professeth himself a Christian on the Foot of the New Testament, he insinuates several Reflections on the Character of our Saviour, and endeavours to invalidate the Attestation given to Christianity by the extraordinary Gifts and Powers of the Holy Ghost.—He pretends that the Apostles preached different Gospels, and that the New Testament is a Jumble of Inconsistent Religions.—His Book fully confuted in the Answers that were published against him.—Some Account of those Answers, as also of the second and third volumes of the *Moral Philosopher*.

SIR,

As you still insist upon my continuing the correspondence on the subject of my former letters, I shall now take notice of a fresh attempt against Christianity, in a book that appeared with a pompous title, *The Moral Philosopher, in a Dialogue between Philalethes, a Christian Deist, and Theophanes, a Christian Jew*—“In which the grounds and reasons of religion in general, and particularly of Christianity as distinguished from the religion of nature, the different methods of conveying and proposing moral truth to the mind, and the necessary marks or criteria on which they must all equally depend, the nature of positive laws, &c. with many other matters of the utmost consequence to religion, are fairly considered and debated, and the arguments on both sides impartially represented,” London, 8vo. 1737. The author of this book, Dr. Morgan, seems at first view to go much farther in his concession, than other his fellow-labourers in the same cause. If we were to judge by some parts of his book, we should be ready to look upon him as having very friendly dispositions towards the Christian religion, since he seems expressly to acknowledge the great usefulness of divine revelation in general, and of the Christian revelation in particular. He speaks of man's natural weakness and inability, and represents those as conceited of themselves, who in the present state of mankind talk of the *strength of human reason in matters of religion*. He observes, that at the time of Christ's appearing, “mankind in general were in a state of gross ignorance and darkness, with respect to the true knowledge of God, and of themselves, and of all those moral relations and obligations we stand in to the Supreme Being, and to one another: That they were under great uncertainty concerning a future state, and the concern of divine providence in the government of the world, and at the same time were filled with a proud and vain conceit of their own natural abilities and self-sufficiency: That our Saviour's doctrines on these heads, though they appeared to be the true and genuine principles of nature and reason, when he had

set them in a proper light, yet were such as the people had never heard or thought of before, and never would have known, without such an instructor, such means and opportunities of knowledge: That they who would judge uprightly of the strength of human reason in matters of morality and religion, under the present corrupt and degenerate state of mankind, ought to take their estimate from those parts of the world which never had the benefit of revelation; and this perhaps might make them less conceited of themselves, and more thankful to God for the light of the gospel." He asks, "if the religion of nature, under the present pravity and corruption of mankind, were written with sufficient strength and clearness upon every man's heart, why might not a Chinese, or an Indian, draw up as good a system of natural religion as a Christian, and why have we never met with any such?" He adds, that "let us take Confucius, Zoroaster, Plato, Socrates, or the greatest moralist that ever lived without the light of revelation, and it will appear, that their best systems of morality were intermixed and blended with so much superstition, and so many gross absurdities, as quite eluded and defeated the main design of them."* This author could scarce have declared more expressly than he hath here done against Tindal's darling scheme, concerning such an absolute universal clearness and sufficiency of the light of nature in the present state of mankind, as renders revelation entirely needless and useless. To which it may be added, that he speaks in many passages very honourably of Jesus Christ, and the religion he hath introduced, as having brought clearer discoveries of our duty, and enforced it by stronger motives, and provided more effectual aids, than ever was done before. And accordingly he expressly declareth himself to be a *Christian on the foot of the New Testament*.

If we were to form our judgment of him merely from such passages as these, it might be thought to be doing wrong to our moral philosopher, to rank him in the list of the deistical writers; but by a prevarication and a disingenuity which is not easily paralleled, except among some of those that have appeared on the same side, under all these fair pretences and disguises, he hath covered as determined a malice against the honour and authority of the Christian revelation, as any of those that have written before him.

It is not easy to form a distinct notion of what he understandeth by that revelation, the usefulness of which he would be thought to acknowledge. He granteth, "that God may, if he thinks fit, communicate his will by *immediate inspiration*, or *supernatural illumination*; yea, and that what he thus communicates may come with evidence equal to a mathematical demonstration."† Yet he plainly intimates, that it can never be proved, that God had ever thus communicated his will, and treats such inspiration as the invention of our *spiritual scholastics* or *systematical divines*. By several passages of his book, especially if compared with what he saith in his

* Moral Philosopher, vol. i. p. 144, 145.

† Ibid. p. 83, 84.

second volume, which he published in defence of it, it appeareth, that by *revelation* he understandeth any discovery of truth, in *what way soever a man comes by it, even though it be by the strength and superiority of his own natural faculties*.^{*} So that all that have discovered rational or moral truth by their own study and application, in the use of their natural faculties, may be said, according to this account of it, to have had the light of revelation; and if so, it is not easy to see how he could consistently represent whole nations, among whom he reckoneth the Indians and Chinese, as *having never had the benefit of revelation*; or how he could say, that the most eminent philosophers and moralists, such as Confucius, Zoroaster, Plato, Socrates, *lived without the light of revelation*. For will he say, that none of them had any discovery or manifestation of rational moral truth made to them in any way whatsoever, no, not so much as in the exercise of their own natural faculties?

The great principle he hath laid down, and which runs through his whole book, is, that there is but one certain and infallible mark or criterion of divine truth, or of any doctrine or law as coming from God, and that is, the moral truth, reason or fitness of the thing itself, when it comes to be fairly proposed to, and considered by the mind or understanding. He frequently declareth, that we are not to receive any thing as true in religion upon any authority whatsoever,† or upon any other foundation than its own intrinsic evidence, or moral fitness; and this he explaineth to be its conducibleness to our happiness, as appearing to our reason, independently of all authority. So that after all his fair pretences about the benefit of revelation, we are not to receive any thing upon the authority of revelation at all. Supposing any persons to have been extraordinarily sent of God, to make a discovery of his will concerning truth or duty, whatever credentials they produce to prove their divine mission, we are not to receive any thing upon that authority, no more than if they were not thus extraordinarily sent of God. The doctrines and laws they deliver as from God, in what way soever they are attested and confirmed, are really and entirely on the same footing with the opinion of philosophers or moralists, who do not pretend to be extraordinarily sent of God at all; *i. e.* we are to believe the doctrines they teach, if upon examining them we find them to be true, by reasons drawn from the nature of things; and we are to submit to their precepts and directions, if upon considering them we are satisfied that they tend to our own advantage and happiness; but their authority, abstractly from the reason of the thing, must have no weight to determine us. Thus the proper use and advantage of revelation, which is to assure us by a divine testimony of the truth of things, which either we could not have known at all, or not so certainly or clearly, by our own unassisted reason; and with regard to our practice, to direct us to our duty, and bind

^{*} Moral Philosopher, vol. i. p. 343. vol. ii. p. 12, 13, 25, 26, 44.

† Ibid. vol. ii. p. 6, 21, &c.

it upon us by express precepts, confirmed by a divine authority, is entirely set aside by this author. Accordingly he will not allow either miracles or prophecy to be any proof of divine revelation, or any reason at all for our believing any doctrines, or submitting to any laws, which have this attestation given to them. This being the true state of the case, according to him—that nothing is to be received upon the authority of revelation—it is to no great purpose to inquire how this revelation is communicated to us. Yet he makes a great noise about the uncertainty of the manner of conveying a revelation to us. He frequently seems to make a mighty difference between *immediate* and *traditional revelation*; and sometimes puts on an appearance of granting, that inspiration or extraordinary revelation from God is a sufficient ground of assurance to the person or persons to whom this revelation is originally and immediately communicated. But upon a close examination, and by comparing several passages in his book, it will be found, that he does not, and indeed cannot in consistency with his scheme, allow, that those persons to whom this revelation is immediately made, have any way of being sure of the truth of what is thus communicated, but by the reason of the thing, by its own intrinsic evidence, or apparent tendency to our benefit. And those to whom this revelation is traditionally communicated, may have the same kind of assurance; *i. e.* they may believe it, if upon examining they find it to be true, by arguments drawn from the nature and reason of the thing. So that, upon his scheme, immediate revelation makes no difference, though he often talks as if there were a very great one.

It appeareth upon this view, that though he sometimes seems absolutely to contradict and subvert the scheme of the author of *Christianity as old as the Creation*; yet at the bottom, his own scheme cometh pretty much to the same thing. He, as well as that author, is for discarding all authority, even a divine one, in matters of religion; and represents the receiving anything purely upon such authority, as a renouncing our reason. According to him, the only way any man, even of the meanest capacity, can have to be fully assured of the truth of any doctrine in religion, is by the reason of the thing, or its own intrinsic evidence, independent of all authority or testimony; and in like manner, with regard to practice, the only way any man hath of knowing any thing to be his duty, is its conducibleness to his own happiness in the circumstances he is in; of which every man is to be the judge for himself. To put all duty and obedience upon this foot, would go a great way to dissolve all bands of government, human and divine; since upon this scheme, it is in effect left to men themselves, whether and how far they shall obey; *i. e.* so far only as they apprehend the thing required to tend to their own happiness. And certainly it cannot be denied, that considering the present darkness and corruption of mankind, and how much they are influenced by their appetites and passions, they would be in great danger, if left to themselves, of forming wrong judgments concerning their own happiness, and what is conducive

to it, or connected with it. Such a scheme might be consistently advanced by Dr. Tindal, who supposed, though contrary to evident fact and experience, that the whole law of nature and fitness of things is obvious to all mankind, even to those that cannot read their mother tongue. But it seems not so easily reconcilable to the concessions made by the *Moral Philosopher*, who acknowledgeth the present *weakness* and *inability* of reason, and that the law of nature is not written *with sufficient strength and clearness in every man's heart*, in the *present corrupt and degenerate state of mankind*.

We have seen the regard this writer hath to revelation in general. As to the revelation contained in the holy Scriptures, he expressly and avowedly rejecteth the Old Testament, and openly declareth that he will have nothing to do with it in his religion. He representeth the law of Moses, as "having neither truth nor goodness in it, and as a wretched scheme of superstition, blindness, and slavery, contrary to all reason and common sense, set up under the specious popular pretence of a divine instruction and revelation from God." And he endeavours to prove, that this was the sentiment of St. Paul. Among other heavy charges which he hath advanced against that law, one is, that it encouraged human sacrifices, as the highest act of religion and devotion, when offered not to idols, but to God; and he takes occasion to consider the case of Abraham's being commanded to offer up Isaac, which he represents as absolutely un-hinging and dissolving the whole law of nature. He then goes on to consider the spirit of prophecy. He representeth the Urim and Thummim as a priestly cheat, and afterwards proceedeth to make a very odious, though inconsistent, representation of the character and conduct of the ancient prophets; against whom he exclaimeth as the great disturbers of their country, the authors of all the civil wars and revolutions in the kingdoms of Israel and Judah, and the cause of the final ruin of both; though the contrary is evident from the very historical accounts to which he pretendeth to appeal. And he praiseth Ahab and Jezebel, and other idolatrous princes, for having endeavoured to destroy them.

As to the New Testament, though he frequently affecteth to speak with great veneration of Jesus Christ, yet he insinuateth very base and unworthy reflections upon his person and character: that he pretended to be the Messiah foretold by the prophets, though he very well knew that those prophets had only spoken of a temporal Jewish prince, who was to arise and reign in Judea; and that accordingly he suffered himself to be carried about by the mob as their Messiah for a twelvemonth together; and did not renounce that character till his death, when he absolutely disclaimed his being the Messiah foretold in the prophetic writings, and died upon that renunciation. As to the apostles, the first authorized teachers and publishers of the religion of Jesus, he affirms, that they themselves never so much as pretended to be under the unerring guidance and inspiration of the Holy Ghost; that they differed among themselves about the most concerning parts of revelation; and preached dif-

ferent, and even contrary, gospels; and that all the apostles, except St. Paul, preached what he calls the Jewish gospel, viz. *salvation by Jesus Christ as the Jewish Messiah, i. e. the national prince and deliverer of the Jews*. This, which he all along explodes as false and absurd, he represents as the only proper essential article of the Christian faith. As to the attestations given to our Saviour's divine mission, and to the doctrines taught by the apostles, by miracles, prophecy, and the extraordinary gifts of the Holy Ghost, he absolutely denieth them to be any proofs at all. Finally, though he professeth himself to be a *Christian on the foot of the New Testament*, yet he representeth it as leaning strongly towards Judaism, which is, in his opinion, a system of superstition and *tyranny*. He pretends, that Christ's own disciples represented things according to their Jewish prejudices, and therefore *are not to be depended upon for a just account either of doctrines or facts*; and that the New Testament was corrected, revised, and published by the Jews, who altered it according to their own prejudices and false opinions; so that, as it now stands, it is a system of Judaism, a *jumble of inconsistent religions*.

You will allow me here to observe, that a writer must have an uncommon degree of confidence, to represent the New Testament as corrupted and altered by the Jews according to their own prejudices and false opinions, when not one of their peculiar and most darling notions and prejudices is to be found in this book, but much to the contrary; whereas, if they corrupted it at all, it must be supposed that they would have corrupted it in favour of those notions and prejudices. No where is the observance of the Mosaic law prescribed to Christians, or insisted upon as necessary to the favour of God under the gospel. The Messiah there spoken of is the author of a spiritual salvation, and the Saviour of the world, not the national deliverer of the Jews only. And the Gentiles are represented as incorporated into his church and kingdom, and as sharers in his benefits, equally with the converted Jews. The New Testament is so far from being a jumble of inconsistent religions, that it is evidently one and the same scheme of religion that is carried on in the writings of the Evangelists, the Acts of the Apostles, and the Apostolical Epistles. The same doctrines are every where taught, relating to God, to our Lord Jesus Christ, the great and only mediator between God and man, and the methods of our redemption and salvation through him; relating to the terms of our acceptance with God, to the resurrection of the dead, the general judgment, and the eternal retributions of a future state. The same excellent laws and precepts are every where inculcated, the same duties enjoined towards God and man, the same purity of heart and life indispensably required, the same noble motives are every where proposed to animate our obedience, the same discoveries and displays of the divine grace and mercy, the same encouragements given to the truly penitent, the same gracious assistances promised and provided for the upright and sincere, the same awful threatenings

denounced against those that go on in a course of presumptuous sin and disobedience. Thus one beautiful and harmonious scheme of religion appears throughout, uniform and consistent in all its parts, which shews that those sacred writings have not undergone any material corruption. Some have found fault, that some of those writings seem to have been written occasionally, and that the Christian religion is not delivered there in a systematical way, but it has been much more wisely ordered. If it had been delivered once for all in a formal system, it might have been more easily altered and corrupted, or at least there would have been greater ground of suspicion that it was so; whereas, as the case now stands, the doctrines and laws of it, and the most important facts relating to it, are repeated and inculcated in so many places, and on so many different occasions, that without a total alteration and corruption of those original writings, which could not be effected, the religion must still be maintained and preserved.

But to return to our *Moral Philosopher*, he honoureth himself, and those of his sentiments, with the title of *Christian Deists*, as the author of *Christianity as old as the Creation* had done before him, as if they only were the true Christians; and brandeth all others, *i. e.* those that acknowledge the divine authority of the Christian religion, as taught in the New Testament, with the character of *Christian Jews*. He frequently inveighs against all *historical faith*, and *books of historical religion*, as he calls the holy Scriptures, as of no use or importance at all; as if the belief of the important facts recorded in the gospel, relating to our Lord Jesus Christ, had nothing to do with the faith of a Christian. All the religion he is pleased to allow to those whom he characterizeth as *Christian Jews*, is only an *historical, political, clerical, mechanical faith and religion*; whilst he appropriateth *real religion*, and *moral truth and righteousness*, to himself, and those of his own faction.

One of the first tracts which appeared against the *Moral Philosopher* was an ingenious piece, written by Mr. Joseph Hallett, viz. *The Immorality of the Moral Philosopher, being an Answer to a Book lately published, intitled, "The Moral Philosopher,"* 8vo. 1737. He afterwards published *A Vindication of it in a Letter to the Moral Philosopher*, who had answered it. Some time after, there were two large answers published to that book, of both which I shall give a distinct account. The first I shall mention is entitled, *Eusebius, or the true Christian's Defence, against a late Book, intitled, "The Moral Philosopher,"* Cambridge, 8vo. 1739, by John Chapman, M.A. now Dr. Chapman. In this learned and accurate work, the author doth not examine the whole of the *Moral Philosopher's* book, nor concern himself with the particular objections he had brought against the Jewish and Christian revelation, but applies himself to consider the main principles of his scheme, and on which the whole structure depends.

He begins with his fundamental principle, viz. "that moral truth, reason, and the fitness of things, are the sole certain mark or crite-

tion of any doctrine as coming from God." He shews the ambiguity of the praise, and the various senses it is capable of, and that in no sense can it be understood to be a proper mark or criterion of any doctrine or law, as having come from God in a way of extraordinary revelation, concerning which alone the question lieth. That therefore we must have some other mark or criterion, which may evidence an extraordinary interposition of God, and his testimony to the truth of what is delivered in his name. And particularly he setteth himself to prove, that miracles and prophecy are evidences of an extraordinary divine interposition and testimony. He treats the question about miracles largely and distinctly, and, after having stated the true notion of a miracle, shews, that miracles may be of such a nature, and so circumstanced, as in some cases to prove the divine mission of the persons by whom they are wrought, and the truth and divine authority of the doctrines which are attested by them, independently of all consideration of the doctrines themselves; but that when they are all considered in conjunction with the good tendency of the doctrines and laws that are thus attested, they incontestably demonstrate the divine original of those doctrines and laws. He hath good observations on the great use of miracles, as the plainest and most popular, the most short and compendious way of proving a divine revelation, and judiciously obviates the objections made against the proof from miracles, both by the *Moral Philosopher* and by others that have written on the same argument before him. He also vindicates the argument from prophecy against this writer's exceptions.

Having shown what are the true proofs of original revelation, he proceeds to consider *traditional revelation*, concerning which the *Moral Philosopher*, after many others, had raised a great clamour, under pretence that there can be no such thing as divine faith upon fallible human testimony. This, Dr. Chapman hath examined very fully, and hath clearly shown, that the original revelation itself, together with the accounts of the proofs or extraordinary facts whereby it was at first attested, may be transmitted to after-ages, with such a degree of evidence, as may make it reasonable for those to whom it is thus transmitted to receive it as divine, or as having originally come from God, and consequently may lay a just foundation for their receiving it with a divine faith. He afterwards applieth what he had said concerning the original proofs of revelation, and concerning that revelation's being safely transmitted to after-ages, to the revelation which was published by our Lord Jesus Christ, and his apostles. He sheweth at large, that the miracles which were wrought were of such a kind, as were sufficient alone to prove to eye-witnesses his and their divine mission, and, when farther considered in conjunction with the doctrines taught by him and them, amounted to a full demonstration of it. He then proceeds to show, that these miracles, together with particular accounts of our Lord's doctrines, and those of his apostles, were faithfully recorded, and committed to writing by those who were witnesses to

them; and that these writings have been transmitted with unquestionable evidence of their being genuine and uncorrupted in all material points; and that therefore we cannot refuse to receive them, but upon principles which would absolutely destroy the credit of all past facts whatsoever.

He next proceeds to consider and explain the nature of the Christian religion as distinguished from deism, which the *Moral Philosopher* and others would confound. He answers the objections those writers had urged from the pretended ambiguity and obscurity of Scripture, and the differences among Christians about the interpretation of the Christian doctrines; and concludes with a vindication of that great article of the Christian faith, which this writer had endeavoured to pervert and expose, concerning our Lord Jesus Christ, as the true Messiah foretold by the prophets. The prophecies relating to the Messiah are considered; and from thence it is evinced, that he was not to be merely a national Prince, and deliverer of the Jews, but the Saviour of the world; and was not merely to erect a temporal dominion, but a spiritual kingdom of truth and righteousness.

There was another answer published about the same time, viz. *The divine Authority of the Old and New Testament asserted, &c. against the unjust Aspersions and false Reasonings of a Book, intitled "The Moral Philosopher,"* London, 8vo. 1739. After what was said on a like occasion in my last letter, I shall make no apology for giving some account of this answer; which is the rather necessary, because the *Moral Philosopher*, in the second volume he published, and of which some notice must be taken afterwards, bent his force principally against it. The design of this answer was to take a distinct view of what Dr. Morgan had offered both against revelation in general, and against the holy Scriptures in particular; and it cost some pains to range the objections of that writer in some order, which are scattered with a strange confusion through his book. This answer begins with stating the question concerning revelation in general, the usefulness of which the *Moral Philosopher* makes a show of acknowledging, and yet in effect leaveth no way of knowing when such a revelation is really given. His pretended sole criterion of moral truth and fitness is examined; and it is shown, that miracles may be so circumstanced for number, nature, and continuance, as to yield a sufficient attestation to the divine mission of the persons by whom, and to the divine authority of the doctrines and laws in confirmation of which they are wrought; and that the account of these extraordinary miraculous facts, as well as the laws and doctrines attested and confirmed by them, may be transmitted to us in such a manner, that it would be perfectly unreasonable to deny or doubt of them.

From the question concerning revelation in general, the author of this answer proceeds to what is the principal design of his book, viz. to vindicate the revelation contained in the holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testament. And first, the law of Moses is vindicated

at large against the objections of the *Moral Philosopher*; and the excellent design, nature, and tendency of it is distinctly shown. Particularly, that law is cleared from the charge of countenancing and encouraging human sacrifices; and as the case of Abraham's offering up Isaac has been often insisted upon, and particularly is represented by this writer, as absolutely subversive of the whole law of nature, and a command which it was impossible for God to give; or for us to have any proof that it was given, care is taken to set this whole matter in a proper light, and to answer the objections that have been made against it. The same is done with regard to the war against the Benjamites in the affair of Gibeah, of which our author had made a most odious representation, with a view to cast a reflection on the oracle of Urim and Thummim. The prophet Samuel and David are cleared from the unjust aspersions he had cast upon them; and the scandalous representation he had made of the latter's dancing naked before the ark; as also what Lord Shaftesbury had offered on the same subject, and concerning the *naked saltant spirit of prophecy* are considered, and the injustice and absurdity of it shown. The characters of the ancient prophets are vindicated; and the author's gross falsifications, and strange perversions of the Scripture-history exposed. With regard to the objections brought by the *Moral Philosopher* against the New Testament, particular notice is taken of his base insinuations against the character of our blessed Saviour, and especially of his pretence that Jesus at his death renounced his being the Messiah foretold by the prophets. It is shown, that he claimed to be the Messiah, and that he was really so in the true sense of their prophetic writings. As to the apostles, it is proved, in opposition to what he had confidently asserted to the contrary, both that they themselves professed to be under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and that they gave sufficient proofs to convince the world of their divine mission. The attestation given to them by the extraordinary gifts of the Holy Ghost is particularly considered; and the author's pretence, that the false teachers, as well as the true, had those extraordinary gifts and powers, and made use of them in confirmation of their false doctrines, is examined, and shown to be vain and groundless. The account he giveth of the Jewish Gospel, which he pretends was preached by all the apostles but St. Paul, is shown to be entirely his own fiction; and the harmony between St. Paul and the other apostles, and the wisdom and consistency of their conduct, are manifested. The attempt he maketh against the whole canon of the New Testament, as if it were corrupted and interpolated by the Jews, is considered. And whereas, under pretence of rectifying the errors of Christianity with regard to some particular doctrines of Christianity, he had severely inveighed against the doctrine of Christ's satisfaction; this is vindicated against his exceptions. Finally, the argument he would draw from the differences among Christians, to prove that none of the doctrines of revealed religion are of any certainty or use to mankind, is shown to be vain and inconclusive.

The author of the *Moral Philosopher*, who was a writer of great vivacity, did not continue long silent. He published a defence of his former book, in what he called *The second volume of the Moral Philosopher; or, a farther Vindication of Moral Truth and Reason*. This was chiefly designed against the author of the answer last mentioned, except a long letter addressed to Eusebius, i. e. Dr. Chapman. In this book, he talks with the same confusion that he did before, concerning moral truth and reason, as being the sole criterion of divine truth, or truth as coming from God; without adding any new proof, or distinctly explaining what he means by it. He represents his adversaries, and all the advocates for revelation, as *renouncing all evidence from nature and reason in matters of religion*; and that, in their scheme, natural and revealed religion are two *essentially different and opposite religions*. This is a very unfair representation; since he could not but know, that they maintain, that there is a harmony and connection between reason and revelation; and that revelation leaves all the proofs of religion drawn from reason in their full force, and adds to them the attestation of a divine authority or testimony. And this must certainly be of great weight. It gives a farther degree of certainty and evidence, even with regard to those things, of which we might have some discovery by our reason before, as well as furnisheth a sufficient ground of assent with regard to things, which we could not have known by mere unassisted reason.

As to the proofs of revelation, he still insisteth upon it, that miracles are no proofs; but he takes very little notice of what his answerers, and particularly Dr. Chapman, who had treated this question largely and distinctly, had offered to prove that they are so. He lays down several observations tending to show the great difficulty there is in knowing which are true miracles. To this purpose he observes, that men may easily be mistaken, and think those things to be miracles which are not so; or they may be imposed upon by artifice, or the strength of their own imaginations, so as to take those things to have been done, which really were not done: That persons are much more liable to be deceived, and often have been so, in judging of things supposed to be supernatural, than in things that come in the common course; and that even those before whom they are supposed to have been originally wrought may be thus deceived, much more those to whom they come only by report. All that follows from these, and other observations to the same purpose, amounts really to no more than this, that great and particular care and caution is necessary to guard against deception in things of so extraordinary a nature. But it is far from proving, either that it is impossible that any true miracles should ever be done, or that we should have any satisfactory evidence or certainty concerning them. Notwithstanding all that this writer hath offered, it is still true, that miracles may be so circumstanced with regard to their number, nature, and continuance, that persons may be as certain of their having been really done, as they can be of any facts

whatsoever for which they have the testimony of all their senses ; and may be also certain, that they are things absolutely exceeding all human power. They may also be of such a nature and tendency, and so manifestly designed to promote the cause of righteousness and virtue, that we may be sure they were not done by any evil being superior to man ; and must therefore have been done either by the immediate power of God himself, or by superior good beings acting under his direction. It hath been often shown, that such were the miracles wrought at the first establishment of the Jewish and Christian dispensation. They were done in so open a manner, and produced such effects, that those before whom they were wrought had as full an assurance of the reality of them, as they could have of any facts whatsoever ; and at the same time could be but sensible that they exceeded all the power of man. And they were also of such a nature, that they could not without the highest absurdity be supposed to have been wrought by any evil being or beings ; and therefore ought to be regarded as the testimony of God to the divine mission of the persons by whom, and to the truth and divine original and authority of the doctrines and laws in confirmation of which they were wrought.

Our author indeed hath in this book made an extraordinary attempt, with regard to the miracles of Moses, to prove, that though that vast assembly of people were made to believe that those things were done before their eyes, and that they themselves saw them done, yet they were never really done at all ; and in order to account for this, he makes some of the wildest suppositions that ever entered into the head of any man that was not absolutely out of his senses. But lest this should not take, his next attempt is to prove, that those miracles, if wrought at all, were done by an evil power ; as if any evil being, even supposing, what is absurd to imagine, that he were capable of exerting such amazing acts of divine power as were exhibited at the establishment of the Mosaic dispensation, would do it, to confirm a system of laws, which prescribed the adoration of the one living and true God, in opposition to the then spreading idolatry, and strongly obliged men to the practice of virtue and righteousness. The chief proof he bringeth for so strange an assertion is, the command relating to the destruction of the Canaanites, on account not only of their impure and cruel idolatries, but of the most abominable crimes and vices, which then universally prevailed among them ; as if it were impossible for God, in any circumstances of things, ever to give such a command. This, which hath been frequently urged by the writers on that side, particularly Dr. Tindal, was considered in the *Answer to Christianity as old as the Creation*, vol. ii. p. 352—358, 2nd edit. And upon its being here repeated by the *Moral Philosopher*, was again examined, and obviated in the 2nd volume of *The Divine Authority of the Old and New Testament asserted*, p. 97, &c. It is also set in a proper light by Mr. Lowman, in his *Dissertation on the Civil Government of the Hebrews*, p. 220, &c.

As to our Saviour's miracles, this writer pretendeth, contrary to Christ's own most express declarations, that he did not appeal to them as proofs of his divine mission. He also repeateth the stale objection, which hath been often answered and exposed, that the miraculous cures which Jesus wrought were owing to the strength of fancy and imagination in the patient, and not to power in the agent. But, whatever we suppose the force of imagination in some cases to be, there are many of our Lord's miracles of such a kind, that there cannot possibly be the least room or pretence for such a supposition.

With regard to the conveyance of divine revelation, it had been shown, that doctrines and laws which were originally received by revelation from God, together with an account of the extraordinary facts or proofs whereby that revelation was attested, may be transmitted to after-ages in a manner that may be safely depended upon; and that the doctrines and facts of the Christian revelation have been so transmitted. He hath little to oppose to the clear and distinct proofs that were brought for this, but some general clamours, which he repeateth on all occasions, about the uncertainty of tradition and fallibility of human testimony; though it be incontestably evident, that laws and facts may be, and often have been, transmitted in this way, with such a degree of evidence and certainty, that it would be perfectly unreasonable, and contrary to common sense, to deny or doubt of them; and yet all along throughout his whole book, he argues as if it were sufficient to destroy the authority of the Scripture-revelation, that its doctrines and laws, and the account of its important facts, have been transmitted through the hands of weak and fallible men. This he representeth as a placing the most important divine truth on the foot of fallible human testimony. But however specious this may appear, and fitted to impose upon superficial inquiries, there is nothing in it of real weight; for if a revelation or law had any original divine authority, and, that it might be of use to succeeding ages, was committed to writing, which is the surest method of conveyance; and if we have sufficient evidence to give us reasonable assurance, that this written revelation has been safely transmitted to us, without any material corruption or alteration, as hath been often plainly shown with regard to the Christian revelation; then it is as really of divine authority now as it was at first, and we are obliged to receive and submit to it as such. For it doth not lose its authority by being committed to writing; nor doth its authority depend on the intermediate conveyers, any more than the authority of a law formerly enacted by the legislature can be said to depend upon the persons by whom it has been transcribed or printed, but upon its having been originally enacted by the legislature.*

As to the objections this writer had urged in his former book against the revelation contained in the Holy Scriptures of the Old and

* See concerning this, "Divine Authority of the Old and New Testament asserted," vol. ii. p. 24, 25.

New Testament, and which had been particularly considered, he repeats them again in this book with greater confidence than before, and often without taking the least notice of what was offered to the contrary; or if he makes a show of answering, very lightly passeth over what was of principal importance in the argument. He gives himself little trouble about the gross misrepresentations and falsifications of the sacred history which had been plainly proved upon him, but still persisteth in the charges he had advanced, and addeth farther invectives; at the same time assuring his reader, that his answerer *had not said one word to the purpose*, and that what he had offered was *one continued rant*. And sometimes, as in the case of the Messiah's being, according to the prophetic writings, a mere temporal prince of the Jews only, our author, instead of answering the proofs which had been brought to the contrary, declares it to be a point so evident, that he *scorns to dispute with any man that will deny it, i. e.* he scorns to dispute with any man that will not give him up the very point in question.

These are arts of controversy which none would envy him the honour of. And he frequently expresseth himself in a manner that shows little regard to common decency; as when he saith of David, *Away with him to the devil from whence he came!* And speaking of the Jews, he avers, that this *miraculously stupid people was always inspired and possessed with the spirit of the devil*. And the Christians come in for their share of the compliment; for he adds, that *they, i. e.* the Jews, *have transfused their spirit and faith into Christians*.

It would not be worth while to mention these things, if it were not to give some idea of the temper and genius of this writer. He has gone so far as boldly to pronounce, that the God of Israel, to whom the priesthood was *instituted*, and *sacrifices were offered*, was a *cheat* and an *idol*, as much so as any of the Pagan deities, and that he was only considered as a local tutelar deity; though one would think it scarce possible for any man seriously to read the Old Testament; and not be sensible that the God there every-where recommended to our adoration and obedience, and whom the people of Israel were obliged by their law to worship, exclusively of all idol deities, is represented as the maker of heaven and earth, the sovereign Lord of the universe. In his former book he had sometimes spoken with great seeming respect of Christianity; but here he throws off all disguise, and does what he can to expose it to the derision and contempt of mankind. Nothing can be more scandalous than the representation he makes of the effusion of the Holy Ghost on the day of Pentecost. He avers, that those who had the gift of tongues could not speak those languages with any sense, coherence, or consistency; that they only uttered a strange kind of gibberish, which neither they themselves nor any body else could understand. And yet it appears from the account that is given us, that the people of many different countries, which were come from all parts to Jeru-

saalem at the feast of Pentecost, understood the apostles, as speaking to them in their several languages the *great things of God*, and were filled with such admiration on this account as produced the conversion of great numbers of them to the Christian faith. He pronounces, that they who seemed to have these gifts *were out of their wits for the time*, and expressly calls them *frantic fits*; and what is very extraordinary, pretends to prove all this from the authority of St. Paul himself, who, according to his representation, must have been one of the maddest enthusiasts that ever lived; though at other times he thinks fit to extol him as *the bold and brave defender of religion and liberty*.

He concludes his book with a fresh invective against the law of Moses, as if it were designed to indulge men in personal intemperance, and were wholly calculated for the interest of his own family; though no lawgiver ever gave greater proofs of his disinterestedness than Moses did; as he made no provision for raising his own children to honours and dignities in the state, but left them to continue in the rank of common Levites. The last thing he mentions is the law about the trial of jealousy, of which he gives a strange account. But this, as was clearly proved against him, dependeth wholly upon his own false and arbitrary suppositions, which betray either great ignorance or wilful misrepresentation.*

It could not be a very agreeable employment to carry on a controversy with such a writer. There is however a second volume published of the *Divine Authority of the Old and New Testament asserted*, by the author of the first, which was designed as an answer to the second volume of the *Moral Philosopher*, London, 8vo, 1740. In this reply, every thing in his book is considered that had any appearance of reason and argument; and his unfair representations, his unjust aspersions, and confident attempts to impose falsehoods upon his reader, are detected and exposed. And whereas there is no part of his book that seems to have been more laboured, than where he undertakes to prove, that the tribe of Levi had above twenty shillings in the pound upon all the lands of Israel, the extravagance of his computations is plainly shown. But no man hath set this matter in a clearer light, than Mr. Lowman, in his learned and judicious *Dissertation on the Civil Government of the Hebrews; in which the Justice, Wisdom, and Goodness of the Mosaical Constitution are vindicated; in particular from some late unfair and false Representations of them in the "Moral Philosopher,"* London, 8vo, 1740.

But this author was not to be convinced or silenced. He soon after published what he called the *Third Volume of the Moral Philosopher; or, Superstition and Tyranny inconsistent with Theocracy*, London, 8vo, 1740. In the body of this book, which is particularly designed as an answer to the second volume of the *Divine Au-*

* See "*Divine Authority of the Old and New Testament asserted*," vol. ii. p. 362, & seq.

thority of the Old and New Testament asserted, there is scarce any thing new attempted. The same things are repeated over again, in a strain of confidence peculiar to this writer; and at this rate it is easy to write books and carry on controversies without end. But there scarce needs any other confutation of what he hath here offered, than to desire the reader carefully to compare it with the book to which it is pretended to be an answer. The only farther observation I would make upon it is, that our author, contrary to his usual custom, has in one instance condescended to acknowledge a mistake he had been guilty of in his former volume. It is in his computation of the Levitical revenues, in which he had made an overcharge in one single article of no less than one million two hundred thousand pounds a year. Yet so fond is he of what he had advanced concerning the Levites having, by the Mosaical constitution, the whole wealth and power of the nation in their hands, that he still endeavours to support it by some very extraordinary calculations; the falsity and absurdity of which was soon after clearly and fully exposed by Mr. Lowman, in an appendix to his *Dissertation on the Civil Government of the Hebrews*, London, 1741. But the most remarkable thing in the third volume of the *Moral Philosopher*, and that part of it which may be most properly called new, is a long introduction, of above an hundred pages, in which he pretends to give an account of the ancient patriarchal religion, and an historical relation of the descent of the Hebrew shepherds into Egypt; the rise and foundation of the Mosaic theocracy; the inconsistencies and self-contradictions of the Hebrew historians, &c. In this part of his work he hath, if possible, exceeded himself in misrepresentation and abuse; but I shall take no farther notice of it than to observe, that there were solid and ingenious remarks made upon it, by a gentleman that styles himself "Theophanes Cantabrigiensis," in a pamphlet intitled, *The ancient History of the Hebrews vindicated*, Cambridge, 8vo, 1741. And afterwards by Dr. Samuel Chandler, in his *Vindication of the History of the Old Testament, in answer to the Misrepresentations and Calumnies of Thomas Morgan, M. D. and Moral Philosopher*; the first part of which was published, London, 1741, and a second part came out in 1743, and after Dr. Morgan's death. It is here plainly proved, that this writer hath been guilty of manifest falsehoods, and of the most gross perversions of the Scripture-history, even in those very instances in which he assureth his reader, he hath kept close to the accounts given by the Hebrew historians. The author of the *Resurrection of Jesus considered*, who wrote soon after, thought fit to make a very contemptuous representation of Dr. Chandler's performance. He is pleased to represent him, as having levelled all his artillery of wit, learning, and spleen against the *Moral Philosopher*, Dr. Morgan, instead of answering; and as having fired off twenty sheets to shoot one of his, and missed the mark.* This no doubt must pass for a

* *Resurrection of Jesus considered*, p. 71, 72. edit. 3d.

full confutation of Dr. Chandler's work. But all that can be gathered from it is, that, with these gentlemen, the proving of any of them guilty of the most gross falsifications of Scripture, which had been fully proved upon Dr. Morgan, is to pass for a thing of no consequence; as if falsehood and misrepresentation were to be looked upon as very allowable, when put in practice for so good an end as the exposing Christianity and the Holy Scripture. It is proper here to observe, that the ingenious Mr. Hallet, who, as was mentioned before, had early appeared against the first volume of the *Moral Philosopher*, published also *A Rebuke to the Moral Philosopher for the Errors and Immoralities contained in his third Volume*, 8vo, 1740.

I shall conclude this account of the *Moral Philosopher* with observing, that soon after his third volume appeared, Dr. Chapman published a second volume of his *Eusebius, or the true Christian's farther Defence against the Principles and Reasonings of the Moral Philosopher*, London, 8vo, 1741. In this he considers at large all that this writer had offered concerning what he calls the Jewish gospel, which he confidently affirms was preached by all the apostles but St. Paul, and of which he pretends the temporal kingdom of Christ in the Jewish sense was the principal article. He shows, with the clearest evidence, that this was not preached by any of the apostles, and that there was a perfect harmony between them and St. Paul, as to what concerned the authority and obligation of the Jewish law under the gospel. He also judiciously explains and vindicates the Scripture-doctrine of redemption, and the satisfaction of Christ, against that author's objections and gross misrepresentations.

The following this extraordinary writer through his several books, and the answers that were made to him, has engaged me in a detail which I am afraid has not proved very agreeable to you, any more than it has been so to myself. But it may be of some use to show, that, notwithstanding his boasted pretences, there have been few writers who have been more effectually confuted and exposed, than he that was pleased to honour himself with the title of the *Moral Philosopher*.

LETTER XI.

Observations upon the pernicious Tendency of the Pamphlet intituled *Christianity not founded on Argument*.—The Design of it is to show, that the Christian Faith has nothing to support it but a senseless Enthusiasm.—The Author's great Disingenuity and Misrepresentations of Scripture detected.—He strikes at natural Religion, as well as revealed, destroys all Certainty of Reason, and declares against Education, and the instructing Children in any Principles at all.—The principal Arguments he hath offered in Support of his Scheme considered.—Christianity no Enemy to Examination and Inquiry.—Men's being commanded to believe, no Presumption that Faith is not a reasonable Assent.—The Faith required in the Gospel is properly a Virtue, and the Unbelief there condemned is really a Vice.—His Pretence, that the People are not capable of discerning the Force of the Proofs brought for Christianity, and therefore cannot be obliged to believe it, examined.—Account of the Answers published against him.

SIR,

THE controversy with the *Moral Philosopher* was scarce at an end, when a new and very remarkable pamphlet appeared, intituled, *Christianity not founded on Argument*, London, 1742. The author of this carried on his design against the Christian religion, in a way somewhat different from what others had done before him. Under specious appearances of zeal for religion, and under the cover of devout expressions, he hath endeavoured to show, that the Christian faith hath no foundation in reason, nor hath any thing to support it but a wild and senseless enthusiasm, destitute of all proof and evidence. And if this could be made out, it would no doubt answer the intention he too plainly appears to have had in view, the exposing the Christian religion to the derision and contempt of mankind. With great gravity and seeming seriousness he sets himself to show, that a rational faith, *i. e.* as he explains it, "an assent to revealed truth founded upon the conviction of the understanding, is a false and unwarrantable notion."* That "that person best enjoys faith who never asked himself one single question about it, and never dealt at all in the evidence of reason."† That God never intended that we should make use of our reason, or intellectual faculty at all in believing, or that our faith should be founded upon any evidence which might convince the judgment, or make it reasonable for us to believe. This he undertakes formally to prove, first by several arguments drawn from the nature of reason and religion; and afterwards he endeavoureth to prove the same thing from the account given us in Scripture.

Having thus, as he pretends, removed the false grounds of faith and religion, and shown that it hath nothing to do with reason or argument, he next proceeds to declare what is the true principle of

* *Christianity not founded on Argument*, p. 7.

† *Ibid.* p. 29.

faith; and this he resolves wholly into a *constant particular revelation, imparted separately and supernaturally to every individual*:* That "the Holy Ghost irradiates the souls of believers at once with an irresistible light from heaven, that flashes conviction in a moment; so that this faith is completed in an instant, and the most perfect and finished creed produced at once, without any tedious progress in deductions of our own."† He represents this great dictator and infallible guide, as having promised "to abide with us to the end of the world, that we might not be left liable one moment to a possibility of error and imposture;‡ and as speaking the same thing to all, and bringing them to think all alike.§ Nothing can be more absurd in itself, nothing more contrary to plain undeniable fact, than this immediate infallible inspiration of every particular person, which causes *men to think all alike*, and does not leave them liable one moment to a *possibility of error and imposture*; and yet this he makes to be the sole foundation of the Christian faith. He represents it to be of such a nature as to render all outward instruction, and even the Scriptures themselves, entirely needless; and that those who are thus instructed by the Spirit, "need not concern themselves about the credit of ancient miracles, or the genuineness of distant records:" as if the Christian faith had nothing to do with the facts recorded in the gospels. This he calls the *revealed and scriptural account of the matter*;|| and pretends, that "this account depends not upon the strength of any single quotation whatever, but on the joint tendency and tenor of the whole."¶

This pamphlet was received by the enemies of Christianity with great applause; and yet, upon a close examination, there are such apparent marks of great disingenuity in it, as should tend, with fair and candid minds, to give very disadvantageous impressions both of the author, and of a cause that needs such base arts to support it.

The whole turn of the pamphlet is in a religious strain; he formally pretends to offer up his most ardent prayers in behalf of his friend at the throne of grace, "that God would be pleased himself to illuminate and irradiate his mind with a perfect and thorough conviction of the truth of his holy gospel; that the same Holy Spirit that first dictated the divine law would powerfully set on his seal, and attest its authority in his heart."** Such a strain of ridicule as this, for whosoever impartially considers this treatise can regard it in no other view, is one of the most solemn mockeries that were ever offered to the Supreme Being. In many other passages, under pretence of exalting the influence of the Holy Spirit, the Scriptures are depreciated, as of no use; they are called, by way of contempt, *manuscript authorities*, and *paper revelations*; as if the being committed to writing could destroy the authority of a divine law; when the man would be thought out of his senses that should, under the same pretence, attempt to invalidate the authority of hu-

* Christianity not founded on Argument, p. 122. † Ibid. p. 89. ‡ Ibid. p. 60.
§ Ibid. p. 89. || Ibid. p. 68. ¶ Ibid. 105. ** Ibid. p. 112.

man laws. It is observable, that the most highflown enthusiasts have always spoken with disregard of the Holy Scripture, and represented it as a *dead letter*; which by the way is no great sign of its being of an enthusiastic nature and tendency; and this writer hath endeavoured to take advantage of their madness for exposing the authority of the sacred writings. Thus the deists can upon occasion run into the wilds of enthusiasm, and join with the men they most heartily despise, in order to answer their design of exposing Christianity. Such hath been the fate of holy writ, to be undervalued by those that had no religion at all, and by those that have carried religion up to madness and phrenzy.

But what greatly strengthens the charge of disingenuity against this writer is, that he is guilty of the most gross misrepresentations of scripture, and the matters of fact therein contained; some of which are of such a kind as to be scarce reconcileable to any degree of honesty and candour. He pretends to prove, from the plain narrative part of the New Testament history, that Christ and his apostles, in planting the gospel, never proposed arguments or evidences of any kind to engage men to believe: whereas it is manifest, from the accounts given in the *gospels*, the *acts*, and the *epistles*, that the method of Christ and his apostles took to make converts was, by assiduous instruction, by teaching and preaching, and by laying before them evidences of the most convincing kind, and which made it reasonable for them to believe.

There can scarce be a more glaring instance of disingenuity than to assert, as this writer does, contrary to Christ's own most express declarations (concerning which, see John v. 36. x. 25. 38. xiv. 11. Matth. xi. 3, 4, 5, 6.), that he himself never designed, that his miracles should be regarded as proofs and evidences of his divine mission; that he was *always remarkably upon the reserve when he happened among unbelieving company*: and that he took particular care that his miracles should not come to public notice, and *See thou tell no man* was generally the charge; though it is manifest from the whole gospel, that he generally wrought his miracles in the most public way, before great numbers of people, and in the presence even of his most malicious adversaries; and there were only a very few instances in which he seemed to be upon the reserve, for which no doubt there were good reasons, some of which may be gathered from the circumstances of the cases mentioned. But such is the manner of this writer; if he can find a particular instance or two that seems favourable to his intention, he lays hold of this, contrary to the whole tenor of the gospel-history, and would put it upon his reader, as if what was done for special reasons in a very few instances, were constantly and always the case in every instance. Thus he positively asserts, that our Saviour "constantly stipulated before-hand, for a certain degree, and no ordinary one, of confidence and persuasion in the persons on whom he wrought his miracles."* This he seems to lay a particular stress

* Christianity not founded on Argument, p. 49.

upon; and yet it is so far from being true that this was *constantly* the case, that there are comparatively but a very few instances in which he previously required persons to profess their belief in him. In one of the answers to this pamphlet, there are near fifty instances produced of miracles wrought by our Saviour where no such thing was required.* And in the few instances where it was insisted upon, it was not a commanding those to believe in an instant who did not believe before: it was only a requiring them to profess the faith they already had, and a declaring his approbation of their faith, and was designed as a means to strengthen it more and more. And the propriety of his taking this method in some instances is manifest, as it tended to direct men's views to that which was the principal use and end of his miracles, and which our author hath thought fit to deny, *viz.* to confirm their faith in his divine mission.

With the same unfairness he confidently avers, that, according to the Scripture accounts, the apostles always expected to make their converts by a word's speaking; that they never allowed any time for deliberation, but denounced damnation against those that hesitated in the least; and that they discouraged all examination and inquiry; when on the contrary it appeareth, that they often staid a considerable time together in a place, reasoning in the synagogues, repeating their excellent instructions, and performing the most illustrious miracles, as proofs of their divine mission. That St. Paul abode for a long time at Iconium, for a year and six months at Corinth, and for above two years at Ephesus. It is also evident that they encouraged men to examination and inquiry, and commended them when they did so; a remarkable instance of which we have in the encomium bestowed upon the Bereans, who examined the apostles' doctrine, and *sought the Scriptures daily, whether these things were so*, as they had taught them; and the consequence of this their diligent examination was, that *many of them believed*, Acts xvii. 10, 11, 12.

The representation this author makes of the influence of the Holy Spirit imparted to all believers is also highly disingenuous, though in it he pretends to keep close to the Scripture accounts. He represents it as absolutely excluding all outward teaching, and all use of our own endeavours: and yet nothing can be more evident than it is from the whole gospel, that we are required to be diligent in the use of our own endeavours; and the great usefulness of outward teaching is constantly supposed, and provision is made for its continuance in the Christian church. With the like candour he pretendeth, that, according to the Scripture account, faith is perfected in an instant, and admitteth of no degrees; and that the Spirit causeth all believers to *think alike*, and raiseth them above all *possibility of error*; whereas it is evident, that faith is there represented as not ordinarily completed at once, but capable of continual growth and improvement, and as admitting of various degrees. And it is

* Benson's Reasonableness of the Christ. Relig. &c. p. 181—188.

every where supposed, that believers may in many things be of different sentiments, and are to bear with one another in their differences.

These and other things of the like kind, are so palpably misrepresented, that it can hardly be supposed that this writer himself, who is quick-sighted enough when he pleases, should not have been sensible that they were so.

Another thing that may give us no very advantageous notion of the author's design is, that he hath advanced several things which seem to have a bad aspect on natural religion as well as revealed, and representeth the former as not founded on reason and argument any more than the latter. He pretends, that all attempts to prove the principles of natural religion by reason hath done more harm than good; and that "even upon the plainest question in nature, the existence of a Deity, the laboured productions of Dr. Clarke himself have rather contributed to make for the other side of the question, and raised a thousand new doubts in the reader's mind."* Accordingly he takes a great deal of pains to destroy all certainty of reason. He represents it as perpetually fluctuating, and never capable of coming to a certainty about any thing; and as if truth and falsehood may be equally proved by it. The bulk of mankind are, according to him, under a natural incapacity of acting at all; and as to the *ablest and best of men*, "they are equally disqualified for fair reasoning by their natural prejudices; which, being ever earlier than the first efforts of reason, is as absolute a disqualification for such a trial, as the greatest natural incapacity."†

But surely all who have any regard to religion, or who think that reason is an advantage or privilege, and that men are to be regarded as rational thinking beings, moral agents, must look upon this way of representing things as absolutely subversive of all religion and morality. It tendeth to debase and vilify human nature, and to cast dishonour upon God's government and providence; as if he had taken no care of mankind at all, but gave them up entirely to their passions, without any principle of reason to guide or govern them; or at least had placed them in such circumstances, that, as this writer declares, *reason always comes too late with its assistance*, and not till *we are lost in the power of evil habits beyond recovery*.

To all this it may be added, that there are several passages in his book, in which he absolutely declares against instructing children in religious or moral principles, as a wicked attempt to prepossess their tender minds, and as barring all farther improvement. No care is to be taken to cultivate the minds of young persons, under pretence that this would only tend to fill them with prejudices. Thus there is no advantage at all in being born in an enlightened or civilized age or nation; and a child in Great Britain must be left as much without instruction, as if he were born in the wilds of America. To make this scheme of a piece, and perfectly consistent, it should

* Christianity not founded on Argument, p. 81. † Ibid. p. 17, 18, 23, 26.

be so contrived, that children should not be trained up to any language at all, and that they should be kept from all converse with others, for fear of their being prepossessed; and that they should be left wholly to nature, without instruction of any kind. And what a hopeful state of things this would introduce, is easy to see. Thus, to avoid Christianity, these gentlemen seem willing to sink us into the lowest degree of barbarism and brutality.

Having made these general observations on the spirit and design of this applauded performance, and the pernicious tendency of it to subvert all certainty of reason, and natural religion as well as revealed, I shall now take some notice of the principal things he hath offered in support of his scheme, and to show that Christianity hath no foundation in reason.

One of his arguments bears a near affinity to what has been just mentioned concerning education; for he produceth it as a proof, that the Christian religion is not a rational one, because we are baptized into it, and obliged to train up children in the knowledge and belief of it. A strange argument this! since common sense tells us, that the more rational and excellent any religion is, the more requisite it would be to instruct children in the principles of it, and to set its doctrines and evidences in a proper light before them, as far as they are capable of receiving them; for this would be the best preservative against the pernicious influence of corrupt principles, and the power of wrong affections and evil habits, which otherwise, by the author's own acknowledgment, would be apt to get the start of them, and give a wrong bias to the mind.

He seems to lay a great stress on the sudden conversions we sometimes read of in the New Testament; but they are far from being proofs of what he brings them to prove, that those persons were converted without reason and experience. All that can be fairly concluded from those instances is, that the evidence that was offered was so strong, and came with such light and force, as did more to produce conviction in a short time, than a long course of abstracted reasonings would have done. If there were some thousands, as he observes, converted at one lecture,* these instances only relate to the conversions that were wrought at Jerusalem soon after our Lord's resurrection and ascension, of which the people had such convincing evidences by the extraordinary effusion of the Holy Ghost on the day of Pentecost, and the signal and undeniable miracles wrought by the disciples in the name of a risen Jesus, as, joined with what they had known before our Saviour's admirable discourses and illustrious miracles, as well as the extraordinary events that had happened at his crucifixion, to which they themselves had been witnesses, rendered the evidence so strong and striking, that it was perfectly rational to submit to it, and receive it.

The passage of the apostle, 2 Cor. x. 4, 5. *The weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down*

* Christianity not founded on Argument, p. 39.

*of strong holds, casting down imaginations, or reasonings, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ, is produced by this writer to show that the gospel is not only without all evidence, but contrary to reason. And yet the manifest design of it is to show, not that the gospel had no evidence to support it, but that the evidences accompanying it were so strong and convincing, as were vastly superior to any arguments or reasonings that could be brought against it. But there is no injunction there laid upon Christians, as the author pretends, "to lay reason under the most absolute restraint and prohibition, and not to permit it the least opportunity or freedom to exert itself, or interpose upon any occasion whatsoever."**

Another argument with which he makes a mighty parade is to this purpose, that no religion can be rational that is not founded on a free and impartial examination.† And such examination supposes a perfect neutrality to the principles which are examined, and even a temporal disbelief of them, which is what the gospel condemneth. But this proceeds upon a wrong account of the nature of free examination and inquiry. It is not necessary to a just inquiry into doctrines or facts, that a man should be absolutely indifferent to them before he begins that inquiry, much less that he should actually disbelieve them; as if he must necessarily commence atheist, before he can fairly examine into the proofs of the existence of God. It is sufficient to a candid examination, that a man apply himself to it with a mind open to conviction, and a disposition to embrace truth on which side soever it shall appear, and to receive the evidence that shall arise in the course of the trial. And if the inquiry relateth to principles in which we have been instructed, then, supposing those principles to be in themselves rational and well founded, it may well happen, that, in inquiring into the grounds of them, a fair examination may be carried on without seeing cause to disbelieve, or doubt of them through the whole course of the enquiry; which in that case will end in a fuller conviction of them than before.

But there is no argument on which he seems to place a greater stress, to show that Christianity is not founded on reason and evidence, than this, that we are there authoritatively commanded to believe, and penalties are denounced against us if we do not believe; whereas it is plain, that "no proposition can be tendered to our reason with penalties annexed, or under the restraint of threats and authority;"‡ since assent or dissent is an independent event, under no influence of ours." Men are constantly determined to believe according to the evidence that appeareth to them, and the will hath nothing to do with it; and therefore there can be no virtue in believing truth, or fault in rejecting it. And he expressly affirms, "that a determination either right or wrong in matters which are not self-evident, and in which there is anything of induction or in-

* Christianity not founded on Argument, p. 84. † Ibid. p. 5. ‡ Ibid. p. 8.

ference, is equally meritorious.”* This is a very convenient plea for infidelity, and so it is for atheism itself; since it proceeds upon this foundation, that men can never be obliged to believe any principles at all in which there is any thing of induction or inference, nor consequently those relating to the existence of God and a providence. And if there be no fault in disbelieving those principles, there can be no fault in refusing to obey, or worship him, which necessarily dependeth upon the belief of his existence. But the foundation this goes upon is manifestly false; as if men were always, and in all cases, determined by mere evidence, and that assent and dissent were therefore necessary acts, and absolutely out of their power. Nothing is more undeniable from common observation and experience, than that the will and affections have a great influence on the judgment; and that we have a great deal of freedom in the right or wrong use of our reasoning faculties, and consequently are liable to praise or blame on that account. Let the proofs that are offered be ever so plain, we may choose whether we will attend to them; or we may turn our eyes from the evidence; or, if we profess to examine, may, through prepossession and wrong dispositions of mind, institute a slight, a partial, and defective examination. Men may be, and often are, so biassed by the influence of affections and interests, as to cause things to appear to them in a quite different light than otherwise they would do. All the world owns, that a candour and simplicity of heart, the love of truth, and a readiness to embrace it when fairly proposed, is a very commendable disposition of mind; and that refusing to receive it through the influence of corrupt affections and passions is really culpable. But this especially holdeth in truths of a religious and moral nature. Our believing or disbelieving them is very much influenced by the good or bad dispositions of our minds, and must have a great effect upon the practice; and therefore in these cases to receive and embrace these truths may be an important duty, and to disbelieve or reject them may be highly criminal; and God may very justly interpose his authority to require the one, and warn men against the other.

The author all along supposeth, that the faith required in the gospel is no more than a bare assent of the understanding, and the unbelief there condemned is a mere speculative dissent. But this is a wrong representation; nothing is more evident than that the faith required in the gospel of those to whom it is made known, that faith to which the promises are made, is a complex thing: it includeth a love of truth, and a disposition to embrace and profess it, which, in the circumstances in which Christianity first appeared, argued a great deal both of candour and fortitude; and it is always represented to be of a vital operative nature, a principle of holy obedience, and which purifieth the heart, and leadeth men to do the will of God, and obey his commands. And such a faith is certainly a virtue, and very properly the subject of a divine command; and the

* Christianity not founded on Argument, p. 17, 18.

unbelief there condemned is supposed to proceed from men's being under the influence of corrupt affections and prejudices, and from their unwillingness to receive the truth, because their deeds are evil. It is expressed by their *shutting* their eyes, and *hardening* their hearts, lest they should *see with their eyes*, and *understand with their hearts*, and be *converted* and *healed*. And this certainly argueth a bad and vicious disposition of soul, and leadeth to disobedience; and is therefore very properly forbidden in the divine law.

With regard to human laws, when they are once sufficiently promulgated, it would scarce be accepted as a plea for men's neglecting or breaking those laws, that they are not satisfied that they are the king's laws; and that no man can be justly obliged, under the restraint of authority and penalties, to assent to this proposition, that these are the king's laws; since assent is not in our own power. It is very probable, that a way would soon be found to overrule this plea, and convince them that authority could interpose in this manner. In like manner, it seems to be obvious to the common sense and reason of mankind, that if God hath given a revelation or discovery of his will, concerning doctrines and laws of importance to our duty and happiness, and hath caused them to be promulgated with such evidence as he knoweth to be sufficient to convince reasonable and well-disposed minds, that will carefully attend to it, he hath an undoubted right to require those to whom this revelation is published to receive and to obey it. And if, through the influence of corrupt affections and lusts, those to whom this revelation is made known refuse to receive it, he can justly punish them for their culpable neglect, obstinacy, and disobedience. Our author himself, speaking of the Spirit's working faith in all men, saith, though in evident contradiction to his own scheme, that "the tender of this conviction, however potent in its influence, may yet depend greatly upon the proper dispositions of our minds to give it a reception for its efficacy; and so far will give place, and afford ample matter of trial and probation, and become indeed a test of our obedience. And that in this case disbelief and guilt have a meaning when put together; since the compliance required is, not a compliance out of our power, nor any longer that of the understanding, but of the will, in its nature free, and therefore accountable; and though we are not by any means chargeable for the effects of our apprehension, yet there is no reason but that we may be with all justice called to the strictest account for our obstinacy, impiety, and perverseness."*

I shall only take notice of one thing more, and which is indeed the most plausible thing in his whole book, and that is, that the generality of mankind, even of those among whom Christianity is published, cannot be obliged to believe it, because they have not a capacity to discern and judge of the proofs and arguments which are brought for it. But though it should be allowed, that they

* Christianity not founded on Argument," p. 64.

could not of themselves trace those proofs and evidences, yet there are few but may be made sensible of the force of those proofs and evidences, when set before them by others. And this is sufficient. It is evident to any one that knows mankind, that we are so constituted, as to stand in need of mutual assistance and information, in matters of great consequence to our duty and happiness. Most of the principles of science of every kind are things that must be taught; and there are few that reason out those principles for themselves, but proceed upon them as demonstrated by others, and apply themselves to practice the rules that are founded on those principles. In like manner religion must be taught, or the most of mankind will know but little of it. And if it requireth care and application to understand its doctrines and precepts, and the evidences whereby it is confirmed, this is no argument at all, either against its reasonableness or excellence; for nothing that is truly excellent in knowledge or practice is to be attained to without care and diligence. It is every man's duty in this case to take in what helps and informations he can get; and if we can come to perceive the evidence by the assistance of others, this will answer the purposes of religion as well as if we could do it merely by the force of our own reason without any assistance at all.

It would undoubtedly be a thing above the capacity of the generality of mankind, and what the most learned would not be well fitted for, to trace out all the parts of religion and morality by a regular deduction from the first principles in a way of abstracted reasoning; and therefore it is a great advantage, that God hath given a clear revelation of his will, containing, in plain and express propositions, the principles and doctrines which are of greatest importance to be known, and the duties which are most necessary to be practised. Such a revelation is set before us in the gospel; and the evident marks of disinterestedness that appear in it, without the least traces of a worldly spirit or design, the purity and excellence of its doctrines and precepts, and the uniform tendency of the whole for promoting the glory of God, and the good of mankind, and the cause of virtue and righteousness in the world, furnish arguments obvious to common capacities, that this religion owed not its rise to human policy, to the arts of impostors, or to evil beings, but was of a godlike and heavenly original. And as to historical evidence, persons of common sound understanding may be made sensible, by the help of the learned, that we have all the evidence of the truth of the extraordinary facts, whereby the divine authority of the Christian religion was attested, which can be reasonably desired. That most of those facts were of a public nature, which might have been easily detected and exposed if they had been false; in which case that religion, which had nothing else to support it, and was destitute of all worldly advantages, must have fallen at once. But that this was so far from being the case, that the greatest enemies of Christianity are not able to deny, that, upon the credit of those facts, this religion, though directly opposite to the prejudices which

then universally obtained, and though it had the most unsurmountable difficulties to encounter with, and had all the powers of the world engaged against it, soon made a wonderful progress both among Jews and Gentiles; which, as things were circumstanced, cannot otherwise be accounted for, than by admitting the truth of those extraordinary facts. That the original revelation itself, together with an account of those facts, was committed to writing in the very age in which that revelation was first given, and those facts were done; which is a sure method of conveyance, though oral tradition is a very uncertain one: And that these accounts, which were written by persons who were perfectly acquainted with the things they relate, and which have all the characters of purity, artless undisguised simplicity, and an impartial regard to truth, that any writings can possibly have, were in that very age received with great veneration, as of sacred authority. The copies of them were soon spread abroad into many different countries: they were read in the public assemblies, translated into various languages, and they have been ever since so constantly cited and appealed to in every age by persons of different sects and parties, many of whom have transcribed large portions of them into their writings, that it may be justly said, they have been transmitted with a continued evidence, far greater than can be produced for any other books in the world; and that a general corruption of them, if any had attempted it, would have been an impossible thing. There is nothing in all this, but what persons of common sound sense, who are desirous of information, may be sufficiently assured of by the assistance of the learned: and when, besides this, they feel the power and influence of the doctrines and motives proposed in those sacred writings upon their own hearts, comforting them in all the vicissitudes of mortal life, and animating them to all virtue and goodness, this completeth their satisfaction and assurance; especially when it is farther considered, that we are taught in Scripture to hope, that God's gracious assistances will not be wanting to those that with honest hearts and upright intentions endeavour to know and do the will of God. *For if any man will do his will, saith our Saviour, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself,* John vii. 17.

Our author, in order to shew that the generality of mankind are incapable of judging of the evidence for Christianity, hath taken upon him to pronounce, that there are few that are capable of reasoning at all, *if there is the least of induction or inference in the case.** And this, if it proveth that they are under no obligation to believe Christianity, equally proveth, that they are under no obligation to believe natural religion, not even the existence of a God, or a providence; since here there is certainly room for induction and inference. But the truth is, this is a very false and base representation of human nature: it would follow from it, that the gene-

* Christianity not founded on Argument, p. 17, 18.

rality of men are incapable of moral agency, of virtue and vice, or of being governed by laws ; for this supposeth them capable of understanding what those laws are, and what is the duty required of them, and of making inferences and deductions. And with regard to religion, and its proofs and evidences, it can scarce be doubted, that if men applied themselves to it with the same care and diligence that they generally do in matters of much less consequence, they would attain to such a sense of religion and its evidences, as would both make it reasonable for them to believe it, and to govern their practice by it.

There were several good answers published to *Christianity not founded on Argument*. One of the first that appeared was that written by Dr. Doddridge, which I remember to have read with pleasure, but as I have not had an opportunity of seeing it for some years, cannot give a particular account of it. I shall confine myself to those answers which I have now by me.

The first I shall mention is entitled, *The Reasonableness of the Christian Religion, as delivered in the Scriptures, being an answer to a late Treatise, entitled, "Christianity not founded on Argument,"* by George Benson, afterwards Dr. Benson, London, 8vo. 1743. This may be regarded not merely as an answer to that pamphlet, but as a good defence of Christianity in general, and so the learned author designed it. It consisteth of three parts. In the first part, after having settled the meaning of the word *faith*, and shown what that faith is, which the gospel requireth of those to whom it is made known, and to which rewards are there annexed, and that it is really a virtue; and what that unbelief is which is there forbidden and condemned, and that it is really a vice; he goes on to produce some of the principal arguments which prove the truth of the Christian religion. He first considers what are usually called the internal evidences of Christianity, the reasonableness of its doctrines, of its moral precepts, of its positive institutions, and of the sanctions by which it is enforced; and then considers the external evidence arising from prophecy and miracles, particularly from the resurrection of Christ, and the extraordinary gifts of the Holy Ghost poured forth upon the apostles and first Christians. These things are here set in a fair and agreeable light; and it is also shown, that the accounts given of these things in the New Testament may be depended on, and that we have sufficient evidence of the truth and authenticity of the gospel records. In the second part a solid answer is given to the several objections and difficulties proposed by the author, with a view to show that religion cannot be a rational thing. The third part contains a distinct explication of those texts of Scripture which he had perverted and misapplied. And there is scarce any one text cited or referred to in his whole book which is not here particularly considered.

Not long after this, there was another valuable answer published, entitled, *The Christian's Faith a rational Assent, in Answer to a Pamphlet, entitled, "Christianity not founded on Argument,"* by

Thomas Randolph, D.D., London, 1744. It was published in two parts, and divided into six chapters. In the first, the question in dispute is clearly stated, which is reduced to this: whether the Christian faith be founded on argument, and is ordinarily attainable in a rational way, or is to be acquired only by a *particular revelation imparted supernaturally to every individual*? And he undertakes, in opposition to the author of that pamphlet, to shew, that the Christian's faith ought to be founded upon the conviction of the understanding, and that it is a rational assent, by which he means, that just and satisfactory reasons may be given for the hope and faith we profess. He considers the nature of assent, and shows, that we are not wholly passive in believing or disbelieving, but have a great compass of liberty in the use of those faculties on which assent depends; and that therefore faith may be a virtue, and argue a good disposition of mind, and unbelief be vicious and criminal. In his second chapter, he fairly examines and clearly confutes the author's arguments drawn from the nature of reason and religion: and in the third, the arguments from Scripture, by which he pretends to prove, that we are not to use our understandings in matters of religion. In his fourth chapter, he inquires into the author's own scheme, and the principle of gospel evidence which he has thought fit to assign, which he wholly resolveth into an immediate, infallible, supernatural revelation, darted with an irresistible light into the mind of every particular person: the absurdity of this Dr. Randolph exposes, and answers the pretended proofs brought from Scripture in support of it. The fifth chapter contains a good account of the proofs of the Christian religion, with a particular consideration of the objections of this writer against miracles and traditional testimony. Lastly, he takes notice of the reflections thrown out by the author of that pamphlet against the Church of England in particular.

You will probably expect, that I should take some notice of another answer, which appeared about the same time, and which also met with a favourable reception from the public, viz. *Remarks on a late Pamphlet, entitled, "Christianity not founded on Argument."* These remarks, which were drawn up by me at your own desire, were contained in two letters that were published separately, London, 1744. The design of this answer, which was much shorter than either of the former, was not to enter upon a distinct and particular account of the evidences which are usually produced in proof of the Christian religion, which the author of these letters had considered largely on some former occasions, but to represent in a clear and concise manner the absurdity and ill tendency, as well as manifold inconsistencies, of this writer's scheme; to give a plain confutation of the principal arguments from Scripture and reason, by which he has pretended to support it, and to detect and expose his fallacies and misrepresentations.

But it is time to take leave of this writer, whom I have taken the more particular notice of, because some of his objections are managed with great art, and have a specious appearance.

LETTER XII.

The Resurrection of Christ an Article that lies at the Foundation of the Christian Faith.—Attacked with great Confidence in a Pamphlet, entitled, *The Resurrection of Jesus considered*.—What this Writer offers to prove, that Christ did not foretel his own Resurrection, and that the Story of the Chief Priests setting a Watch at the Sepulchre is a Forgery and Fiction, examined and confuted.—Observations on the extraordinary Way he takes to fix Contradictions on the Evangelists.—The Rules by which he would judge of their Accounts would not be endured, if applied to any other Writings.—He insists on farther Evidence of Christ's Resurrection; and yet plainly intimates, that no Evidence that could be given would satisfy him.—Extravagant Demands of the Deistical Writers on this Head considered.—The Evidence that was actually given, the properest that could be given.—The seeming Variations among the Evangelists, if rightly considered, furnish a Proof of the Truth and Genuineness of the Gospel Records.—An Account of the Answers published to this Author, especially of Mr. West's *Observations on the History and Resurrection of Jesus Christ*.—Sir George Littleton's *Observations on the Conversion and Apostleship of St. Paul* commended.

SIR,

THE resurrection of Christ is an article of vast importance, which lieth at the foundation of Christianity : if this faileth, the Christian religion cannot be maintained, or may be proved to be false. *If Christ be not risen* (saith St. Paul), *then is our preaching vain, your faith is also vain*, 1 Cor. xv. 14. On the other hand, if this holdeth good, the divine mission and authority of the blessed Founder of our holy religion is established. This is what he himself appealed to, as the great and ultimate proof, which was to convince mankind that he was what he professed himself to be, the Son of God, the Saviour of the world. If he had been an artful impostor, it can scarce be supposed that he would have appealed to such a proof as this, which would have been the most effectual way he could have taken to detect and expose the vanity of his own pretences, and overturn the whole scheme of his religion : or, if he had been an enthusiast, and was imposed upon by the warmth of his own imagination, to believe that God would indeed raise him from the dead, the event would have effectually shown the folly and madness of his expectations. And, therefore, since he put the proof of his divine mission upon a thing of so extraordinary a nature, which manifestly exceeded all human power, and was actually enabled to accomplish it, this shows, both that he certainly knew that he was sent of God, and that he really was so. And indeed it cannot be conceived how a more illustrious attestation could possibly have been given to him from heaven, than his resurrection from the dead, in accomplishment of his own prediction, and what followed upon it, his ascension into heaven, and the extraordinary effusion of the Holy Ghost upon his disciples, as he himself had promised. This the enemies of our holy religion are sensible of; and therefore, though they have sometimes affected to argue, that, supposing Christ to have really risen from

the dead, this would not be a valid proof of the truth of the Christian revelation,* they have in all ages bent their utmost efforts against it. Celsus employed all his wit and malice to ridicule it; so have others done since: of late Mr. Woolston had distinguished himself this way; and no part of his discourse on the miracles of our Saviour was so much laboured, as that wherein he endeavoured to show, that the account given by the evangelists of Christ's resurrection is a false and incredible story. But the weakness of his objections was clearly shown in the answers that were made to him; among which *The Trial of the Witnesses*, &c. was especially remarkable, both for the strength of the reasoning, and the ingenious and polite manner of treating the argument. Mr. Woolston himself never attempted to vindicate that part of his Discourse against the answers that had been given to it. But after several years had passed, a bold adventurer appears in a pamphlet, intitled, *The Resurrection of Jesus considered, in Answer to the Trial of the Witnesses, by a Moral Philosopher*, London, 1744; so this gentleman thinks proper to style himself, as Dr. Morgan had done before him. Like that writer, he appears to be of great vivacity, and no small degree of confidence, and to have a high opinion of his own abilities and performances; and, like him, seems resolved to put all the arts of controversy in practice, by which he thinks he might carry his point, without being very solicitous whether they are properly reconcileable to truth or candour. He has with great diligence raked together all that a lively imagination, animated with the most determined malice, could invent or suggest, for misrepresenting and exposing the gospel-history; nor does he, as some others had done, any where pretend a regard to the religion of Jesus, but all along openly declares against it; in which he is so far to be commended, if he had but acted the part of a fair, as he doth of a professed adversary.

The principal things observable in this treatise, with relation to the declared design of it, the overthrowing the accounts that are given us of the resurrection of Jesus, may be reduced to these three heads: 1. He undertakes to prove, that Christ did not foretel his death and resurrection at all, neither to the Jewish priests and Pharisees, nor to his own disciples; and that all that the evangelists say on this head is mere fiction and forgery. 2. That the whole story of the Jewish priests and rulers setting a watch at the sepulchre, and sealing the stone, is false, and a most absurd and incredible fiction. 3. That the accounts given by the evangelists of Christ's resurrection are in every part inconsistent and self-contradictory, and carry plain marks of fraud and imposture. I shall make some observations on each of these; and that I may not return to this subject again, shall take notice, as I go along, of some things advanced by Mr. Chubb, in his posthumous works, to enforce the objections of this writer.

* See a Letter, said to be written by Mr. Collins, to the author of the "Discourse on the Grounds, &c." in answer to Mr. Green's Letters, published in 1726.

It is of great importance to our author's cause to prove, if he was able to do it, that Jesus did not foretel his own death and resurrection: for if he did foretel it, and it was known that he did so, this makes the precautions taken by the chief priests to prevent an imposition in this matter absolutely necessary; and the whole story is perfectly consistent. Besides that, as hath been already hinted, his foretelling a thing of such a nature, which, if he had been an impostor, he must have known it would be absolutely out of his power to accomplish, and which yet was actually fulfilled, affords the most convincing proof, that he was really that extraordinary and divine person he professed himself to be. Our author saw this, and therefore has made an attempt to show, that Jesus did not foretel his death and resurrection, neither to the Jewish priests and Pharisees, nor to his own disciples. With regard to the former, it appeareth from the testimony of the evangelists, St. Matthew and St. Luke, that when the Scribes and Pharisees desired Jesus to show them a *sign from heaven*, he told them, that *no sign should be given, but the sign of the prophet Jonas*. And St. Matthew farther informs us, that he then openly declared to them, that *as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly*, so should the *Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth*, Matth. xii. 38, 39, 40. Which plainly supposed, that, in that space of time, he should, after lying in the earth or grave, rise out of it, as Jonas came alive out of the belly of the fish. From this prediction therefore, which was uttered more than once in the hearing of the Scribes and Pharisees, they might gather that he intended to signify that he should rise again from the dead. What this writer hath offered against this is very trifling. Because St. Luke, in mentioning what our Saviour said concerning the sign of the prophet Jonas, doth not expressly take notice of his declaring, that the Son of man should lie three days and nights in the heart of the earth, he pretends that this is a proof that St. Matthew forged it. Whereas all that it proves is, that St. Matthew hath given a fuller relation of what our Saviour said on that occasion, than St. Luke hath done; though what the latter relateth concerning Christ's mentioning the sign of the prophet Jonas, plainly implieth it. He also repeats what Mr. Woolston had urged, that Christ did not lie three days and nights in the grave; of which I took some notice before in my remarks on Mr. Woolston's discourses. He farther hints at what Mr. Chubb, who wrote after our author, and endeavours to reinforce his objections, has enlarged upon for several pages together,* that Jesus could not have made such a declaration as this, that *no sign should be given to that wicked and adulterous generation, but the sign of the prophet Jonas*; both because their being a wicked generation was rather a reason for giving them a sign, since in that case they needed it most, and the design of his coming was to call sinners to repentance; and because in fact Christ did work signs and wonders among them after this. But to

* Chubb's posthumous works, vol. i. p. 342—347.

take off the force of this, it is sufficient to observe, that by comparing Matth. xvi. 1. Luke xi. 16. Mark viii. 11. it appeareth, that the sign they demanded was a *sign from heaven*, by which they probably meant some glorious appearance in the heavens. They had a little before attributed his miracles to Beelzebub: and now they insisted that he should give them a particular kind of sign; and it was perfectly consistent with his character to refuse to humour them in this demand, which he well knew proceeded from a cavilling temper, and not from minds honestly willing to submit to evidence. But though he refused to give them at that time precisely such a sign as they demanded, he yet both continued to work miracles among them, and referred them to his resurrection, which, taking in the circumstances that attended it, and followed upon it, was, in the fullest and properest sense, a *sign from heaven*, and was sufficient to convince them, if they were disposed to receive conviction. To this it may be added, what St. John informs us of, that in a discourse addressed to a great number of the Jews, among whom were several of his malicious enemies, he plainly spoke of his *laying down his life*, and *taking it again*, and declared that *this commandment he had received of his Father*, John x. 17, 18, 19, 20.

As to his own disciples, under which character others besides the twelve apostles are often comprehended, the author himself acknowledgeth, that the evangelists represent him as having declared to them in plain and express terms, on five different occasions, that he should suffer and die, and rise again on the third day. But because they tell us, that the disciples *did not understand this saying*, and that it was *hid from them*, and that they *questioned among themselves, what this rising from the dead should mean*, he would have the whole pass for forgery and fiction. He thinks it incredible, that twelve men could hear such plain expressions, so clearly foretelling his dying and rising again, and yet not be able to understand them. But this is easily accounted for, considering that the disciples were at that time under the power of those prejudices, which then generally prevailed among the Jews, relating to the Messiah. They could not conceive how the Messiah, who, according to their notions of things, was *to abide for ever*, and not die at all,* could be subject to sufferings and death; nor consequently how he should rise again from the dead. When therefore they heard Jesus, whom they looked upon to be the Messiah, talk of his dying and rising again on the third day, they thought it must be understood in some mystical or figurative sense, and that some meaning which they did not at present comprehend lay hid under those expressions, however plain they might appear; so that this only shows the dulness of their apprehensions, and the force of their prejudices, and at the same time the impartiality of the evangelical historians who have recorded it. But though the disciples could not conceive how Christ should die and rise again on the third day, yet as he so often

* See John xii. 34.

repeated it on different occasions, without ever giving the least injunction to them to conceal it, it may justly be supposed that the saying got abroad, and was known to many. And this coming to the ears of the Jewish chief priests and Pharisees, who also knew what he had said to some of the Pharisees and Scribes concerning the sign of the prophet Jonas, was a sufficient foundation to them to say to Pilate, *We remember that that deceiver said* (not that he *said to us*, as this gentleman thinks fit to quote it, but that *he said*), *while he was yet alive, after three days I will rise again*. There needed no more to put them upon all proper precautions to prevent an imposture in this matter.

This leads me to take some notice of the second main thing this writer insisteth upon, which is, that the story St. Matthew tells of the chief priests setting a watch at the sepulchre, and sealing the stone, is a false and absurd fiction. Mr. Woolston had allowed the truth of the story, and built one of his principal arguments against the resurrection of Jesus upon the circumstance of sealing the stone. And this argument was mightily cried up for a while. But our author had the sagacity to discern, that if this was admitted, it would afford a strong presumption of the truth and reality of Christ's resurrection; and therefore thinks it more for the interest of his cause to deny it. The chief thing he urgeth against the story proceeds upon the supposition, that Jesus did not foretel his resurrection at all, nor had the Jewish priests and Pharisees heard that he had foretold it; and therefore it is absurd to think they would give themselves concern about it. But the falsehood of this supposition hath been already shown; nor is there any thing in the whole story, as related by St. Matthew, that is not perfectly consistent, and highly probable. It is very natural to suppose, considering their characters and dispositions, and the circumstances of the case, that they would take the fittest precautions that the disciples of Jesus might not have it in their power to pretend he was risen from the dead, as it was reported he had foretold; and there could not be a more probable method fixed upon for this purpose, than the setting a watch to guard the sepulchre, and sealing the stone that was rolled to the mouth of it. And though we should allow them to have known, as this writer affirms they did, that Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea had wound up the body in linen and spices, which showed they did not expect his resurrection, yet they knew he had other disciples: and besides might suspect, that all this preparation for embalming the body, was only the better to cover their design of carrying it away. What he farther urgeth concerning their believing him to have been, what they called him to Pilate, a deceiver, instead of being an argument, as he would have it to be, against their using this precaution, would furnish a strong reason for it; since in that case they might be apt to suspect that his disciples would act the part of deceivers too, and endeavour to carry on the imposture, which therefore they were resolved to prevent. And they might think this one of the most effectual methods they could take to convince the people, many of whom

they knew had a high veneration for Jesus, that he was a false prophet, by showing the falsehood of his prediction, concerning his rising again the third day, which would justify their own conduct in putting him to death.

This author thinks it incredible, that the Jews should bribe the soldiers to be silent, when they themselves must upon their report have been convinced of the truth of the fact. But their conduct on this occasion was no other than might be expected from persons of their character. Whosoever considers their determined malice and envy against Jesus, who had unmasked their hypocrisy, and opposed their traditions; how deeply their reputation was engaged, and their authority with the people, as well as that of the Sanhedrim, who claimed to themselves a power of trying prophets, and had condemned him as a false prophet and blasphemer, must be sensible how unwilling they would be to have it thought, that they had wrongfully procured a most excellent person to be crucified, and that they would take all possible methods, by stifling the evidence, to throw off the odium from themselves. To which may be added the power of their prejudices, which would not suffer them to imagine, that a person who had been crucified could possibly be their Messiah, which was absolutely subversive of all their maxims. They who, when they could not deny his miracles, ascribed them to a diabolical power, showed what they were capable of. And indeed the force of obstinate prejudice, hatred, envy, pride, and a desire of maintaining their own authority, all which concurred in this case, is amazing, and hath often caused persons to stand out against the clearest evidence.

The last thing he hath to offer is, that St. Matthew is the only evangelist who relateth the story of sealing the stone, and placing the watch; but this is of small moment: St. Matthew's relation of it is sufficient. He wrote his gospel, by the consent of all antiquity, the first of the evangelists, in a few years after our Lord's ascension, and designed it especially for the use of the Jewish converts; and his relating this story in a gospel published among the Jews, and so early in that very age when the story must have been fresh in remembrance, and when, if false, it might have been easily contradicted, shows that it was a thing well known, and that he was fully assured of the truth of it, and in no fear of being detected in a falsehood. And what farther confirmeth this, is his referring to a report as current among the Jews at the time when he wrote, concerning the disciples having stolen the body, whilst the soldiers that were set to watch the sepulchre slept. The story indeed was not very consistent; but yet, as the case is circumstanced, it was the best thing they had to say. The body was gone out of the sepulchre; either therefore it must be acknowledged that he rose again from the dead, or that his disciples had taken it away; and this, if done at all, must have been done either with the connivance of the guards that were set to watch it, or when they were asleep; the guards, if charged with having connived at it, and with having been bribed by

the disciples, would have been obliged to justify themselves against that charge, and would have told the fact as it really happened; there was nothing therefore left but to pretend that it was done whilst they were asleep. And yet the rulers never pretended to convict the disciples of having stolen the body, nor instituted any process against them on that account; but contented themselves with threatening to punish them if they preached the resurrection of Jesus, which yet they boldly avowed to their faces. As to the author's insinuation, how came St. Matthew to know of the angel's appearing to the soldiers with such circumstances of terror, if they were hired to conceal it, this is easily accounted for; it is only said that *some of the watch* went and told the chief priests, Matt. xxviii. 11. It may therefore be reasonably supposed, that others of them might, immediately after the thing happened, tell it to some other persons; yea, it might probably happen, that some of those who were then hired and bribed might discover it afterwards, when all was over; or that some of the priests, many of whom were afterwards converted to the Christian faith, as we learn from Acts vi. 7, might have known and divulged it.

Thus it appeareth, that this writer's principal objections against this story, and which he insisteth upon as manifest proofs of the absolute falsehood and forgery of the gospel history, are of no force. And yet he taketh upon him to pronounce, that *it is in all views absurd to suppose, that the priests and Pharisees should guard against a resurrection, fraudulent or real.*

He next proceeds to inquire how the witnesses agree in their evidence, and endeavoureth to prove, that the accounts the evangelists give of the resurrection of Jesus are in every part inconsistent and self-contradictory, and carry plain marks of fraud and imposture. And here I shall not enter into a distinct examination of the several more minute particulars he insisteth upon, which are all considered and discussed in the answers that were made to him, but shall content myself with some general observations upon his management of the subject; and first I would observe, that he has thought fit to consider the accounts of the three evangelists, Matthew, Mark, and Luke, separately from St. John; whereas they ought all to be taken together, since they all relate to the same fact of Christ's resurrection; he positively asserteth, that the three evangelists mention in general but three appearances of Jesus; whereas there are plainly seven appearances of Jesus after his resurrection referred to by them, besides two others peculiarly mentioned by St. John: 1. His appearing to Mary Magdalen alone, Mark xvi. 9. John xx. 14, 15, 16, 17. 2. His appearing to the women, Matthew xxviii. 9. 3. His appearing to the two disciples going to Emmaus, Mark xvi. 12. Luke xxiv. 13—32. 4. His appearing to Simon Peter, Luke xxiv. 34. 1 Cor. xv. 5. 5. His appearing to the eleven as they sat at meat on the evening of the day on which he rose, Luke xxiv. 36—43. John xx. 19—23. 6. His appearing to his disciples on a mountain in Galilee, Matt. xxviii. 16, 17. 7. His

appearing to his disciples on the day of his ascension, Mark xvi. 19, 20. Luke xxiv. 50, 51, 52. Acts i. 6—11. Besides these, there are two other appearances of Jesus recorded by St. John, which are not taken notice of by the other evangelists; one is, that to the eleven, when St. Thomas was with them, eight days after the first, John xx. 26—29. The other is, that at the sea of Tiberias, to seven of the disciples, John xxi. 1—14. Here are nine distinct appearances pointed out by the evangelists, which were at different times, and are plainly marked out by distinct characters. But this author, in order to have a pretence for charging these writers with contradictions, thinks fit to confound these different appearances; and the different circumstances and variations, which show that they belong to different appearances, are represented by him as so many inconsistencies in the relation of the same appearance. But by this way of management, instead of proving contradictions upon the evangelists, he only proves his own unfairness and absurdity. Thus *e. g.* St. Luke relates an appearance of Jesus to his disciples at Jerusalem, on the very evening of the resurrection day; St. Matthew tells of an appearance of his to his disciples at a mountain in Galilee, which must have been some time after. The time and place of these appearances are manifestly different; which should lead every person of candour to regard them as different appearances; but our author is pleased to suppose them to relate to the same appearance, and then chargeth these different circumstances as to time and place, as so many contradictions and inconsistencies. This must be owned to be a very extraordinary way of proceeding; and at this rate it will be easy to expose the most authentic history that ever was written.

There is another rule frequently made use of by this writer, and upon which his charge of contradictions against the evangelists principally dependeth, and that is, that if any one of them takes notice of any circumstance or event not mentioned by the rest, this is to pass for a proof of fiction and forgery. According to this new rule of criticism, where several historians give an account of the same facts, if some of them relate those facts with more, and some with fewer circumstances, this shall be sufficient absolutely to destroy the credit of the whole; and they that omit a circumstance, or say nothing at all about it, must be looked upon as contradicting those that mention it. Upon this principle, St. Mark and St. Luke are made to contradict one another; because the latter mentions Bethany or Mount Olivet as the place from whence Jesus ascended, and the former, in mentioning Christ's ascension, takes no notice of the place from whence he ascended. In like manner it is pretended, that St. Matthew and St. John, in contradiction to the two other evangelists, say, that Jesus never ascended at all, because they give no distinct account of his ascension, though they evidently suppose it; and there are more references to it in St. John's gospel, than in any one of the evangelists: see John vi. 62. vii. 39. xiv. 2, 28. xvi. 7, 16, 28. xvii. 5, 11. xx. 17. So because the last mentioned evan-

gelist is the only one of them that mentions the piercing the side of Jesus with a spear, of which he himself was an eye-witness, and gives an account of some appearances of Jesus to his disciples not mentioned by the other evangelist, this shows, according to our author, that he forged those accounts, and that *his evidence destroys theirs, or they his*; though one design of his writing his gospel was to take notice of things which they had omitted; nor do any of them give the least hint that they proposed distinctly to recount all Christ's appearances.

In order to fix the charge of contradictions and inconsistencies upon the evangelists, he pretendeth, that, according to St. Luke, our Lord ascended the very evening of the day of his resurrection. The only proof he bringeth for so strange an assertion is, that St. Luke, immediately after having given an account of our Lord's appearing to the eleven disciples, and others with them, Luke xxiv. 36, and which, by comparing ver. 29 and 33, was pretty late in the evening of the day on which he rose, tells us, that he led them out as far as Bethany, where *he was parted from them, and carried up into heaven*, ver. 50, 51. And this he might justly say, though there was an interval of several days between the one and the other; and it is manifest from other accounts there was, and particularly from what St. Luke himself saith in the beginning of the Acts of the Apostles. It is plain that he intends here only to give a summary narration; and, therefore, after having taken notice of his first appearance to the eleven, the account of which ends at ver. 43, he passeth over the other appearances without a distinct mention; only giving the substance of what Jesus said on some of those occasions, and which he introduces thus, *ἐπεὶ δὲ ἀνέβη*, which may be thus understood, *he said besides, or moreover, unto them*; and then he proceeds to give a short account of Christ's ascension, and of what followed upon it, which he more distinctly relateth in the book of the Acts.

St. Luke observes, that the women, when they went to the sepulchre, *found not the body of Jesus*, Luke xxiv. 3. This our candid author represents as if he had said, that they never saw Jesus at all after his resurrection, dead or alive; and then would have this, which is a manifest perversion of St. Luke's meaning, pass for a contradiction to the other evangelists, who tell that Jesus was seen of the women after he rose again from the dead. To prove that the other evangelists contradict St. John, he represents St. Matthew, Mark, and Luke, as expressly declaring, that Jesus appeared to the eleven disciples *but once* after his resurrection; and yet certain it is, that not one of them says any such thing. Nor do the evangelists any where say, as he affirms they do, that Jesus appeared *but to a very few* after he rose from the dead, which he thinks contradicts the story of the hundred and twenty, and five hundred, mentioned by the author of the Acts and St. Paul. He might as well have pretended, as Mr. Chubb did afterwards, though without offering the least proof to support it, that the word *hundred* in that passage, Acts i. 15, is an interpolation, and that instead of *an hundred and*

twenty, it should be read *twenty*.* Such wretched shifts only discover a fixed resolution not to believe any accounts that should be given.

Our author endeavours to take great advantage, in which he is followed by the last-mentioned writer, of what is told us concerning Christ's appearing to the two disciples going to Emmaus. Because they did not for some time know Jesus, it is argued, that he had not a true body, and that they could not be afterwards sure that it was he; since, if their senses were deceived at first, they might be so afterwards too; and the like may be supposed, as to all Christ's other appearances to his disciples. That the two disciples did not at first know Jesus, is plain from the story; and this may be accounted for in a natural way, if we suppose, that besides some change which there might be in his countenance, occasioned by his sufferings and death, he might on purpose alter the tone of his voice, or have something in his garb, his air and manner, different from what had been usual with him before, or in some other way disguise himself: which seems to be signified, when St. Mark, referring to this, saith, he *appeared in another form*, Mark xvi. 12. And this might hinder them from knowing him, considering how little at that time they expected to see him. Or, if we should suppose, that he employed a miraculous power to prevent their at first knowing him, which was done for a valuable end, that he might have the better opportunity of instructing them in a familiar way in the true meaning of the Scriptures relating to the Messiah, his sufferings and glory, and thereby the better prepare them for the discovery he intended afterwards to make of himself; it by no means follows, that, because they were withheld from knowing him for a while, therefore when he fully discovered himself to them, they could not be certain that it was he. It is plain, that they had afterwards such convincing proofs that it was Jesus, as left no room for doubt in their minds. And that very evening he showed himself again to them, and to the eleven apostles, and others with them; and the more effectually to convince them, showed them his hands and feet, and ate and drank before them; and by the proofs which were given them, both on that and on other occasions, they had as full evidence of the reality of his risen body, as they could have of any thing that came to them confirmed by the testimony of their senses. And to suppose an extraordinary miraculous power employed all along to deceive them, and overrule all their senses, would be to suppose as great a power employed to make them believe a falsehood, *i. e.* to make them believe that Jesus was risen when he was not so, as would have sufficed for the truth of the resurrection; since it would have been as easy for the divine power to have raised his body really from the dead, as to give all those proofs and evidences that were given of a true body without the reality. As to his appearing among them when the *doors were shut*, which is also urged against the truth of his risen body, all that can be fairly concluded from it

* Chubb's Posthumous Works, vol. i. p. 378.

is, that when the doors were shut, which the evangelist tells us was for fear of the Jews, Jesus came suddenly among them, opening the doors at once by his miraculous power; not that his body passed through the doors by a penetration of dimensions, which is the construction the author puts upon it; for this would have entirely destroyed our Lord's own argument, which he used at that very time to convince them that he had a real body. "Behold (saith he), my hands and feet, that it is I myself. Handle me, and see, for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as you see me have." See Luke xxiv. 36, 39, compared with John xx. 19, 20.

It is observable that this writer, in his great eagerness to expose the evangelical accounts, seems not to consider that some of the arguments he hath produced may be turned against him, and prove the contrary to what he produced them for. He frequently lays a mighty stress on those passages which relate to the disciples not having understood our Saviour, when he foretold his resurrection before his death, and to their doubting of his resurrection after it. And yet it is this very thing that gives the greatest force to their testimony. If they had been prepossessed beforehand with a strong belief that he would rise again, or if they had immediately believed that he was risen from the dead upon the first message that was brought to them, it would undoubtedly have been ascribed to the warmth of their imagination, and to a too forward credulity; but as the case is circumstanced, there is no room for this pretence. It is plain, that nothing but the irresistible evidence of their senses brought them to believe at all; and their believing it so firmly at last, so as to be ready to seal their testimony to it with their blood, shows that they were constrained to believe by an evidence which they could not withstand, and which absolutely removed their doubts, and overcame all their prejudices.

The account given by the evangelists of Christ's resurrection is farther confirmed by the testimony of St. Paul, who mentions his having been seen by Peter, by James, and by the twelve apostles; concerning which he had many opportunities of informing himself from the persons themselves. He also maketh mention of his having been seen of above five hundred brethren at once, and expressly affirms, as a thing he was well assured of, that the greater part of them were alive at the time when he wrote this; and it is not to be doubted, that he had seen and known many of them, to whose living testimonies he could then appeal. These things he refers the Corinthians to in his epistle, as things known to be certainly true, and which could not be contested, and concerning which he himself had spoken to them more at large when he was with them, 1 Cor. xv. 1, 2, 3, &c. And in a dispute which he there maintaineth against some who denied the future resurrection of the dead, he principally argueth from the resurrection of Christ, as a fact so fully proved, that they could not deny it. Yet our author is pleased to reject all this at once, because St. Paul *writes by hearsay*, *i. e.* because he was not himself present at those appearances, though he had the account from those who were so: and so fond is

he of this thought, that he repeats it, as his manner is, in three or four different parts of his book. According to this rule, an historian is not to be credited in any fact of which he himself was not an eye-witness, though he might have undoubted assurance of it; a maxim which would destroy the credit of the best historians now in the world. But one should think this writer would at least allow, that St. Paul ought to be credited, when, after mentioning Christ's having appeared to others, he affirms, that he himself had seen Jesus, 1 Cor. xv. 8. ix. 1. But it seems this also is to be rejected, under pretence that he only saw him in a vision; though it was at noon-day, as he was travelling with several others in his company, and which was attended with such remarkable circumstances, and produced such real effects, that if he could not be sure of this, no man can be certain of any thing that he hears or sees. Mr. Chubb indeed, who faithfully treads in our author's steps, takes upon him to affirm, that St. Paul's testimony weakens, instead of strengthening, the evidence of Christ's resurrection; for which he gives, this reason, that though St. Paul had known Jesus before his resurrection, which it doth not appear he did, yet as that glorified body must have been different from what it had appeared to be whilst he was on earth, he could not be a proper judge of the identity of that body with that body which had been crucified.* But it is to be considered, that what St. Paul was to be convinced of, and of which he himself was afterwards to be a witness, was, that Jesus was raised again, and invested with a divine dominion and glory. And of this the appearing of Jesus to him in the manner he did, as he was going to Damascus, and assuring him by a voice from heaven, that it was Jesus whom he had persecuted who then spoke to him, attended with such amazing displays of a divine glory and splendour, together with the remarkable consequences which then followed upon it, especially the extraordinary miraculous gifts and powers with which he himself was endued, and which he was enabled to confer upon others in the name of a risen Jesus, exhibited the most illustrious and convincing proof and evidence that could possibly be desired, and which absolutely overcame all the strong and obstinate prejudices with which his mind was at that very time possessed. So that all things considered, there never was a testimony which deserved greater regard than that of St. Paul, and accordingly it has justly had the greatest weight in all ages.

I pass by other instances that might be mentioned of our author's great unfairness and disingenuity, particularly his gross perversions of several passages of Scripture, and putting a meaning upon them contrary to the plain intention of the writers, with many other things which are fully detected and exposed by his learned answers. But what is wanting in reasoning, is made up in confidence. He boldly pronounceth, that "the witnesses do not all agree in one circumstance, but palpably contradict one another in every particular; and that such inconsistencies, improbabilities, absurdities,

* Chubb's Posthumous Works, vol. I.

and contradictions, would destroy the credit of other histories ;” but he sneeringly adds, “ that the faith of this is founded on a rock.”* And I believe it will hardly be thought too severe a censure to say, that any man who would treat any other historians as this writer hath treated the evangelists, and who would advance such rules of judging concerning any other books whatsoever, as he seems to think fair with regard to theirs, would, instead of passing for a candid and judicious critic, be generally exploded as a malicious and impertinent caviller, that had betrayed a great defect of sense, manners, or honesty.

In my remarks on Mr. Woolston’s discourses in the seventh letter, notice was taken of that grand objection, that our Lord ought to have appeared publicly to the chief priests and rulers of the Jews after his resurrection. I shall not repeat what is there offered in answer to it ; but shall only observe, that our author has endeavoured to strengthen that objection by pretending, that Jesus had actually engaged to do so ; and that “ not to appear to the Jews when he had promised it, and put the truth of his mission upon it, was a denying the truth of his mission, and a falsifying his word.”† Thus he represents it, as if the evangelists had said, that Christ promised to appear publicly to the Jews, and particularly to their chief priests and rulers after his resurrection. But this is entirely his own fiction ; our Lord made no such promise. He declared indeed, that a sign, like that of the prophet Jonas, should be given to *that evil and adulterous generation*, i. e. that sufficient evidence should be given to convince them of the truth of his resurrection. And such evidence there was given, if their minds had been open to conviction ; and vast numbers of the Jews were actually convinced by it. But this writer carrieth it still farther ; he thinks Jesus should have shown himself to the Jews as their deliverer from the Roman yoke, and as their temporal king, that he might prove that he was the Messiah, and fulfil the prophecies.

A reflection occurs to me on this occasion, which you will allow me to mention : It relates to the several demands that have been made by these gentlemen with regard to the evidence, which they pretend ought to have been given to the Jews of our Saviour’s resurrection. The author of *Christianity not founded on Argument* thinks, that Jesus ought to have taken one turn in the market-place in the presence of all the people, and that “ this might have spared both the painful labours and lives of so many holy vouchers.”‡ Mr. Chubb insists upon it, that when Christ was risen, “ he should have repaired to the house of some friend, and made it the place of his residence the time he staid upon earth, that so the rest of his friends, and all others, might know where to see him, and have access to him.”§ And if he had done so, and been publicly visited, and the people had gathered together in crowds, as might in that case have

* Resurrection of Jesus considered, p. 56, 57, 58. † Ibid. p. 59, 61.

‡ *Christianity not founded on Argument*, p. 68. § *Posthumous Works*, vol. I.

been expected, this might have awakened the jealousy both of the Jewish chief priests and rulers, and of the Roman government, and might, in the temper the Jews were then in, have probably produced tumults and insurrections, which would have brought a great slur upon Christianity at its first appearance. And so undoubtedly these gentlemen would have had it; for, according to our author, if Jesus had appeared publicly to the Jews after his resurrection, this would not have been sufficient, if he did not also head their armies. And then to be sure this would have been insisted upon as a manifest proof, that the whole scheme of his religion was false, and a mere piece of carnal policy.

I cannot help thinking upon the whole, that after all the clamour that hath been raised against it, the evidence which was actually given of our Lord's resurrection was the properest that could be given. His making a public personal appearance to the people of the Jews would have been on many accounts improper, and might probably have had bad consequences. But besides the evidence arising from the testimony of the soldiers, who had been set to watch the sepulchre, which was well known to the chief priests, and, notwithstanding all their precautions, had come to the knowledge of others too; besides this, his appearing, in the manner he did, to a considerable number of persons, who had been immediately acquainted with him, to whom he frequently showed himself alive after his passion by many infallible proofs during the course of forty days; his ascending afterwards into heaven in their sight, and the effusion of the Holy Ghost in his extraordinary miraculous gifts and powers, as he himself had promised, upon his disciples, the authorized witnesses of his resurrection, which was done in the most public manner possible, before many thousands of persons of all nations, which were then assembled at Jerusalem; all this, with the following divine attestations that were given them, to confirm their testimony wherever they went, preaching the gospel for many years together, to which testimony they unalterably adhered, in opposition to the greatest sufferings and persecutions to which it exposed them; all this taken together furnished the most proper and convincing evidence, not only of Christ's resurrection, but of his exaltation to glory. And accordingly we find in fact, that his resurrection was accompanied with such proof and evidence, as convinced many myriads (for so it should be rendered) of the Jewish nation, and among them *great numbers of the priests*, Acts vi. 7. xxi. 20. and brought them over, contrary to all their prejudices, to acknowledge one that had been crucified by the heads of their own nation for their Messiah, their Saviour, and their Lord; and afterwards convinced vast numbers of the Gentiles, and gained them over to a religion the most opposite that could be imagined, not only to their prejudices and superstitions, but to their vices, and which exposed its professors to the most grievous reproaches, persecutions, and sufferings.

But to return to our author:—Whosoever carefully considers and compares what he hath offered may easily perceive, that, whatever pretences he may make of demanding other and farther evidence of

Christ's resurrection than was given, no evidence that could have been given of it would have satisfied him. If Jesus had shown himself alive, not only to the Jewish rulers, but to every single person of the Jewish nation, he would have been as far from believing it as he is now; for he intimates, that it would be necessary that Christ should appear again in every age, and every country, and to every particular person; and that all the miracles should be wrought over again.* And even this, upon his principles, would not be sufficient; for he lets us know more than once, that in these cases we are not to trust our own eyesight. He roundly asserteth, that "every miracle is an absurdity to common sense and understanding, and contrary to all the attributes of God."† And that "pretended facts, which are contrary to nature, can have no natural evidence; and that these facts cannot be admitted on any evidence, because they in their own nature exclude all evidence, and allow of no possible proof."‡ This point he hath laboured for several pages together, where he strongly asserteth (for I do not find that he bringeth any thing that can be properly called a proof,) that miracles are impossible. And he had better have stuck entirely to this, since if he could but have proved it, he might have saved himself the trouble of writing the rest of his book.

There is another extraordinary passage in this writer, which deserves to have a particular notice taken of it. After having treated the account given by St. John of the piercing of Christ's side with a spear, and of which he himself was any eye-witness, as a fiction, for no other reason but because the other evangelists do not mention it: he insinuates, that if his side was not thus pierced, he might not be *really dead when he was put into the sepulchre*; and then no wonder that *he rose again*.§ Thus it comes out, that he doubteth even of the death of Jesus, which neither Jews nor heathens ever doubted of. Was there ever a more obstinate or unreasonable incredulity? He might as well doubt, whether there ever was such a person as Jesus, or his apostles, or whether ever the Christian religion was propagated in the world at all. And indeed if, as he affirms, the resurrection of Christ was *the most incredible story that could be told*, and the evidence that was given for it was the *worst evidence that could be given*,|| he might have argued more plausibly than he hath done in most other cases, that it was impossible, as the case was circumstanced, that such a silly story should ever make its way into the world, either among Jews or Gentiles, considering the religion that was founded upon it was absolutely contrary to their most prevailing prejudices, and had no worldly advantages on its side, but all the powers of the world engaged against it; that therefore it is absurd to suppose that Christianity made any progress at all in the first ages, though there is no fact of which we have fuller evidence. And then he would only have one step to advance farther, and which is indeed the natural consequence of this, and that is, to doubt whether

* Resurrection of Jesus considered, p. 62. † Ibid. p. 51, 52. ‡ Ibid. p. 73, 74.
§ Ibid. p. 50. || Ibid. p. 67.

there is any such thing as the religion of Jesus, or any persons in the world that now profess it.

I shall conclude my remarks upon this writer with observing, that the very variations among the evangelists, which he produceth as so many contradictions, do really confirm the truth of the main facts. What he seemeth to insist upon is, that every one of them should tell all the same facts, in the same order and manner, and with the same circumstances, neither more nor less; and that no one of them should mention any thing which is not related by all the rest. And if they had done so, then no doubt this would have been improved as a plain argument, that the whole was a concerted fiction; and that to derive a credit to it, it was pretended to have been written and published by four different persons at different times, whereas these four pretended historians were really but one historian, or, if they were different, they only transcribed one another. But as the case now stands with the evangelists, there is a harmony in the main facts, and in the substance of Christ's discourses; and yet at the same time there is a considerable variety in the order and manner of their narration; such a variety as plainly sheweth these accounts to have been written by different historians, not copied from one another; and that they did not write by concert, in which case they would have been more careful to shun all appearance of contradiction. They write with an unaffected simplicity, and with a confidence of truth, as becometh those that were fully assured of what they relate; each writeth what he knew best, or what he thought properest to take notice of; and yet notwithstanding the seeming variations in the order of their narration, and that some facts, or circumstances of facts, are taken notice of by some of them which are not mentioned by others, it will be found, if narrowly examined, that there is no contradiction between them, and that their accounts may be fairly reconciled. And it is to be hoped, that this author's attempt to expose their authority, however ill intended, will only tend to strengthen it; since though his malice and prejudice are very apparent, and though it is plain that he came to examine their accounts, not with a calm, impartial, and dispassionate temper of mind, but with a resolution, if possible, to find out absurdities and contradictions in them; yet he has not been able to make good the charge. It turns out, that they are perfectly consistent, and that their seeming contradictions admit of a just reconciliation.

I have been carried farther than I at first intended in making observations upon this pamphlet, which gives a true sample of the deistical spirit, and may be regarded as one of the boldest and openest attacks that was ever made upon that grand article of the Christian faith, the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. And I have been the larger and more particular in my remarks upon it, both because of the importance of the subject, which concerneth the very foundation of our holy religion, and because I thought it might be of use to take this occasion to obviate some of the most plausible objections that have been urged against it. And what

hath been here offered may equally serve to take off the force of that part of Mr. Chubb's posthumous works which relates to the same point, and which he hath very much laboured.

But though this letter may seem already to have exceeded its due bounds, it will be necessary, according to the method I have hitherto pursued, to take notice of the answers that were made to this book. Dr. Samuel Chandler, who had on some former occasions appeared to great advantage in the defence of Christianity, published on this occasion a valuable treatise, entitled, "The Witnesses of the Resurrection of Jesus re-examined, and their Testimony proved entirely consistent," London, 1744. It is divided into eight chapters. In the first, it is shewn, that the sufferings and glory of Christ were foretold by the ancient prophets. In the second, that Christ plainly foretold his own sufferings and death, and resurrection to his own disciples. In the third, that he declared his death and resurrection publicly to the Jews. In the fourth, it is proved, that the Jewish rulers and Pharisees procured a guard to be set on the sepulchre of Jesus; and a solid answer is returned to the author's objections against it. The fifth chapter relateth to the appearance of the angels to the soldiers; the propriety of which is vindicated against his exceptions. The sixth chapter is concerning the appearances of the angels to the women after the resurrection. The seventh treats of the several appearances of Christ to the women and to his disciples; and this author's charge of inconsistencies in the evangelic accounts is distinctly considered. In the eighth chapter, Dr. Chandler concludes with summing up the evidence for the resurrection of Jesus, which he hath done with great clearness and judgment.

About the same time there was another answer published by a learned and ingenious but anonymous author, which is entitled, "The Evidence of the Resurrection cleared, in Answer to 'The Resurrection of Jesus considered.'" He follows the author of that pamphlet closely, and shews, that he grossly misrepresents the arguments in the "Trial of the Witnesses," which he undertakes to answer, and that he uses the evangelists still worse. The things which we have mentioned, as taken notice of by Dr. Chandler, are also considered by this writer; particularly it is clearly proved, that Christ foretold his death and resurrection, both to his own disciples and to the Jews; and the author's reasoning and exceptions against the story of setting the guard, and sealing the stone, are shown to be vain and groundless. The accounts given by the evangelists of the appearances of the angels to the women, and of Christ to them and to the disciples, are distinctly considered; and the seeming variations, which the author pretends to be so many contradictions, are accounted for, though in a way somewhat different from Dr. Chandler. The solutions of these difficulties proposed by each of these learned writers, are very ingenious, and may suffice to obviate the charge of contradictions the author hath brought against the evangelists; but some of them are judged not to be quite so clear and natural, as those afterwards given by Mr. West. This anonymous

writer concludes with a distinct examination of what the author of "The Resurrection of Jesus considered" had offered against miracles in general. He hath clearly and judiciously exposed the weakness and fallacy of those reasonings, whereby that author pretendeth to prove, that miracles are impossible both in a physical and moral sense; that they are contrary to God's immutability; that they are perfectly needless, and answer no valuable end at all; and that if they were once necessary, they would be always necessary. Besides the two answers above-mentioned, there was another then published, which I have not seen, and of which therefore I cannot give a particular account, though from the character I have heard of it, as well as from the known abilities of the author, I make no doubt of its being well executed; it is entitled, "An Address to Deists, being a Proof of Revealed Religion from Miracles and Prophecies, in Answer to a Book entitled, 'The Resurrection of Jesus considered,' by John Jackson, Rector of Rossington, London, 8vo., 1774."

Some time after, there was another book published, which was also occasioned by "The Resurrection of Jesus considered," and which particularly engaged the attention of the public, both by its own excellence, and because the author of it was a layman; it is entitled, "Observations on the History and Resurrection of Jesus Christ," by Gilbert West, Esquire, London, 1747. He very justly commends the two learned and ingenious answers above-mentioned, as containing a solid confutation of many objections against Christianity advanced by the author of "The Resurrection of Jesus considered;" but declares himself not to have been so fully satisfied with the manner of their clearing the sacred writers from the contradictions charged upon them. This put him upon examining the Scriptures themselves, and comparing the several accounts of the evangelists with each other, which he hath done with great exactness; and the result of his enquiries was, that by carefully distinguishing the different appearances and events recorded by the evangelists, several of which had been hitherto confounded, he hath happily removed the difficulties and inconsistencies charged upon them, and hath taken away the very foundation of the principal objections that have been so often repeated almost from the beginning of Christianity to this day. I shall not enter upon the particulars of his scheme, which may be seen with great advantage in his book. I shall only observe, that he hath not made use of strained and arbitrary suppositions, but such as seem clearly to arise from the accounts of the evangelists, carefully considered and compared.

By comparing the several parts of the history together, he hath made it to appear, that the women came at different times to the sepulchre, and in different companies, and not all at once, as many have supposed; that there were several distinct appearances of angels, of which he reckons three, besides that to the Roman soldiers, viz. to the other Mary and Salome, to Mary Magdalene, to Joanna and others with her; that these several facts were reported to the apostles at different times, and by different persons; that there were two distinct appearances of Christ to the women; one

of which was to Mary Magdalene alone, the other to the other Mary and Salome ; that St. Peter was twice at the sepulchre, once with St. John, after the first report by Mary Magdalene, concerning the body's not being found in the sepulchre ; the second time after the report made by Joanna, and the women with her, of the appearing of the angels to them. He observes, that Christian writers, dazzled by some few points of resemblance, have confounded these different facts, and thereby given great advantage to the infidel ; whereas, the facts being rightly distinguished, all the objections against this part of the gospel history, as contradictory and inconsistent, entirely vanish ; and it appeareth, that the evangelists, instead of clashing and disagreeing, mutually confirm, illustrate, and support each other's evidence.

This learned gentleman hath made excellent and judicious reflections upon the several incidents in the history of the resurrection, and upon the order in which they happened, and in which the several proofs of the resurrection were laid before the apostles. He shows, that the discovery of it which was made to them was wisely ordered to be gradual ; and that as they were to be the chosen witnesses of the resurrection of Jesus, there was a great propriety in the several steps that were taken to give them the highest conviction of it. There is a train of witnesses, a succession of miraculous events, mutually strengthening and illustrating each other, equally and jointly concurring to prove one and the same fact. And whereas their doubting and unbelief, spoken of by the evangelists, seem principally to have consisted in this, that though they might believe that Christ had appeared to those who declared they had seen him, yet they did not believe that he had appeared to them with a real body, therefore, in condescension to their infirmity, he gave them the fullest evidence of the reality of his bodily appearance.

The proofs of Christ's resurrection laid before the apostles are digested by Mr. West under four heads. 1. The testimony of those that had seen him after he was risen. 2. The evidence of their own senses. 3. The accomplishment of the words he had spoken to them, while he was yet with them. 4. The fulfilling of the things which were written in the law of Moses, and in the Prophets, and in the Psalms, concerning him ; of which Mr. West hath given a judicious summary.

Upon recapitulating the several particulars which constitute the evidence of the resurrection, he concludes, that never was there any fact more fully proved than the resurrection of Jesus Christ ; and that those who were appointed to be the witnesses of it had every kind of proof, that in the like circumstances the most scrupulous could demand, or the most incredulous imagine.

Having considered the proofs of the resurrection of Jesus Christ, as they were laid before the apostles, he proceeds to consider some of the arguments that may induce us, at this distance of time, to believe that Christ rose from the dead ; and these he reduceth to two principal heads : The testimony of the chosen wit-

nesses of the resurrection recorded in the Scriptures ; and the existence of the Christian religion.

With regard to the former, he showeth, that the apostles and evangelists had the two qualities necessary to establish the credit of a witness, a perfect knowledge of the facts he gives testimony to, and a fair unblemished character ; and that their testimony is transmitted down in writings either penned by themselves, or authorized by their inspection and approbation. He offereth several considerations to show the genuineness of those writings, and takes notice both of the internal marks of the veracity of the sacred writers, observable in the Scriptures, and of the external proofs of their veracity and inspiration ; especially the exact accomplishment of the prophecies recorded in those writings. He instances, in those relating to the different states of Jews and Gentiles, different not only from each other, but from that in which both were at the time when those prophecies were written. He observes, that there are several particulars relating to the condition of the Jewish nation, which were most expressly foretold ; as the destruction of the city and temple of Jerusalem, and the signs preceding that destruction ; the miseries of the Jews before, at, and after the famous siege of that city ; the general dispersion of that people, the duration of their calamity, and their wonderful preservation under it ; and finally, their restoration. And since the other parts of these predictions have been exactly accomplished, there is great reason to think, the last will be so too in the proper season.

He concludes the whole with the argument drawn from the present existence of the Christian religion ; and showeth, that, without supposing the truth of Christ's resurrection, there is no accounting for the propagation and present existence of Christianity in so many regions of the world. To set this in a proper light, he representeth, in an elegant and striking manner, the great difficulties this religion had to struggle with at its first appearance, and the inabilities of its first preachers, humanly speaking, to oppose and overcome those obstacles. They had the superstition and prejudices of the Jews to encounter with ; and at the same time, religion, custom, law, policy, pride, interest, vice, and even philosophy, united the heathen world against Christianity. Its opposers were possessed of all the wisdom, power, and authority of the world ; the preachers of it were weak and contemptible ; yet it triumphed over all opposition. And this, as the case was circumstanced, afforded a manifest proof of a divine interposition, and of the truth of the extraordinary facts by which it was supported ; the principal of which is the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Thus have I endeavoured to give some idea of this excellent performance, and have been the more particular in my account of it, because a work of this kind, done by a lay-man, is apt to be more taken notice of and received with less prejudice ; and for the same reason, though it does not come so directly within my present design, I hope you will indulge me in giving some account of a short, but justly admired treatise, which appeared soon after, and

was also written by a learned lay-man, Sir George Littleton. It is entitled, "Observations on the Conversion and Apostleship of St. Paul, in a Letter to Gilbert West, Esquire, London, 1747." The great advantage of this performance is, that the evidence for Christianity is here drawn to one point of view, for the use of those who will not attend to a long series of argument. The design is to show, that the conversion and apostleship of St. Paul, alone considered, is of itself a demonstration sufficient to prove Christianity to be a divine revelation. This design is very happily executed. He first considereth the account St. Paul himself hath given of the miraculous manner of his conversion; and thence argueth, that it must of necessity be, that the person attesting these things of himself either was an impostor, who said what he knew to be false, with an intent to deceive; or he was an enthusiast, who by the force of an over-heated imagination imposed upon himself; or he was deceived by the fraud of others; or lastly, what he declared to be the cause of his conversion, and to have happened in consequence of it, did all really happen; and therefore the Christian religion is a divine revelation. That he was not an impostor, he proves, by showing, with admirable clearness and strength, that he could have no rational motive to undertake such an imposture; nor could possibly have carried it on with any success by the means we know he employed. With equal evidence he sheweth that St. Paul was not an enthusiast; that he had not those dispositions which are essential ingredients in that character; and that he could not possibly have imposed on himself by any power of enthusiasm, either with regard to the miracle that caused his conversion, or to the consequential effects of it, or to some other circumstances which he bears testimony to in his Epistles; especially the miracles wrought by him, and the extraordinary gifts conferred upon him, and upon the Christian converts to whom he wrote. To suppose all this to have been only owing to the strength of his own imagination, when there was in reality no such thing at all, is to suppose him to have been all this time quite out of his senses; and then it is absolutely impossible to account, how such a distempered enthusiast and mad-man could make such a progress, as we know he did, in converting the Gentile world. He next proceeds to show, that St. Paul was not deceived by the fraud of others; if the disciples of Christ could have conceived so strange a thought as that of turning his persecutor into his apostle, they could not possibly have effected it in the manner in which it was effected, with the extraordinary consequences that followed upon it. It is evident, then, that what he said of himself could not be imputed to the deceit of others, no more than to wilful imposture, or enthusiasm; and then it followeth, that what he relateth to have been the cause of his conversion, and to have happened in consequence of it, did all really happen, and therefore the Christian religion is a divine revelation. He concludeth with some good observations to show, that the mysteries of the Christian religion do not furnish any just reason for rejecting the strong and convincing evidence with which it is attended; that

there are several incomprehensible difficulties in deism itself; such as those relating to the origin of moral evil, the reconciling the pre-science of God with the free-will of man, which Mr. Locke owns he could not do, though he acknowledged both, the creation of the world in time, or the eternal production of it. And yet no wise man, because of these difficulties, would deny the being, the attributes, or the providence of God.

But it is time to conclude this long epistle; and here I intended, as you know, to have closed my accounts of the deistical writers. But as you insist upon it, that, in order to complete this design, it will be necessary to take a more particular notice than I have done of Mr. Chubb's *Posthumous Works*, this will engage me to continue my correspondence on this head for some time longer.

LETTER XIII.

An Account of Mr. Chubb's Posthumous Works; his specious Professions, and the advantageous Character he gives of his own Writings—He doth not allow a particular Providence, or that Prayer to God is a Duty—His Uncertainty and Inconsistency with Respect to a future State of Existence, and a future Judgment—He absolutely rejects the Jewish Revelation—His Objections against it briefly obviated—He expresses a good Opinion of Mahometanism, and will not allow that it was propagated by the Sword—He seems to acknowledge Christ's divine Mission, and sometimes gives a favourable Account of Christianity; but it is shown, that he hath done all he can to weaken and expose it, and to subvert its Credit and divine Authority.

SIR,

AMONG the deistical writers of this present age, Mr. Chubb made no inconsiderable figure. He was, though not a man of learning, regarded by many as a person of strong natural parts and acuteness, and who had a clear manner of expression. He was the author of a great number of tracts, in some of which he put on the appearance of a friend to Christianity; though it was no difficult matter to discern that his true intention was to betray it. One of the most remarkable of these tracts was his "True Gospel of Jesus Christ asserted;" in which, under pretence of asserting the gospel of Christ in its genuine simplicity, he really endeavoured to subvert and expose it. This was answered by Mr. Joseph Hallet, in a valuable tract, entitled, "The consistent Christian; being a Confutation of the errors advanced in Mr. Chubb's Book, entitled, 'The true Gospel of Jesus Christ asserted, relating to the Necessity of Faith, the Nature of the Gospel, the Inspiration of the Apostles, &c.' with Remarks on his Dissertation on Providence, 8vo. 1738." Another noted tract of Mr. Chubb's was, his "Discourse on Miracles, in which he proposed to give a representation of the various

reasonings that relate to the subject of miracles. But it is manifest, that his intention was not to clear, but to perplex the subject; and to show, that the proof from miracles is not at all to be depended upon. To this there was a solid and full answer returned by Mr. Abraham Le Moine, which was published at London, 8vo, 1747. Several of Mr. Chubb's tracts were also answered by Mr. Caleb Fleming; but his answers I have not seen. What I propose to consider are those that are called his "Posthumous Works," some of which were printed in his own life-time, and the rest carefully corrected and prepared by himself for the press, and published after his death, in two volumes, 8vo, London, 1748. The first volume begins with a short tract, entitled, "Remarks on the Scriptures." But the far greater part of this volume, and the entire second volume, is taken up with what is called "The Author's Farewell to his Readers, comprehending a variety of Tracts on the most important subjects of religion." It is divided into eleven large sections; and the principal design he appears to have had in view is, to destroy, as far as in him lay, the credit and authority of the Christian revelation. I know of no answer that has been published to this book, and therefore shall be more particular in my remarks upon it, to obviate in some measure the mischief it is fitted to produce.

It is plain, from several hints which he hath given us, that he looked upon himself to be a writer of no small importance. He declares, that he hath treated the several subjects he has "discussed with plainness and freedom, and of course must have ministered to the pleasure of the intelligent part of mankind, whether they approved his sentiments or not."* He begins the first section of what he calls his *Farewell to his Readers*, with expressing his hope, that his "correspondence with them by writing for many years past, has been not altogether useless nor unacceptable to them."† And in the last section of his *Farewell*, which he calls his *Conclusion*, he expresseth himself as one that in these his last writings, was leaving a very valuable legacy to the world. I know few authors, who have taken leave of their readers with a greater air of solemnity than he has done. He calls God to witness to the goodness of his intentions; and declares, that in what he has offered to the world, he has "appealed to the understanding, and not to the passions of men:"‡ That with sincerity and truth he can say, he has had a real concern and regard to the present well-being of his fellow-creatures, as well as to their future happiness:§ And that as he was "in the decline of life, and perhaps not far from the conclusion of it, and being in the full exercise of his intellectual faculties, which are not in the least clouded or impaired, he chose to take his leave of the world as a writer, hoping, that what he has offered to public consideration has had, and may have, some good effect upon the minds and lives of his readers."§ And he concludes the whole with again assuring his readers, that he has laid before them, in the *plainest*

* Posthumous Works, vol. i. p. 64, 65. † Ibid. p. 97. ‡ Ibid. vol. ii. p. 354, 355.
§ Ibid. vol. ii. p. 357, 359, 361.

manner he was able, both in this discourse, and in what he had before published to the world, *those truths* which he thought to be of the highest importance. And so, saith he, "I bid you farewell, hoping to be a sharer with you of the divine favour, in that peaceful and happy state, which God hath prepared for the virtuous and faithful, in some other future world."

Who that considers these solemn expressions, would be apt to suspect, that this very author, in these his farewell discourses, has not only used his utmost efforts to expose Christianity and the holy Scriptures, but has endeavoured to weaken some of the most important principles of natural religion?

He had, in one of his tracts formerly published, shown himself to be no friend to the doctrine of a particular providence; and there are several passages in his "Posthumous Works," which look that way. He plainly intimates, that he looks upon God as having nothing now to do with the good or evil that is done among mankind;* and that men's natural abilities or endowments of body or mind, their fortunes, situation in the world, and other circumstances or advantages by which one man is distinguished from another, are things that entirely depend upon second causes, and in which providence does not interpose at all.† And when he endeavours to show, that no proof can be brought for a future state from the present unequal distribution of things, his argument amounteth in effect to this, that providence hath nothing to do with these present inequalities, nor concerneth itself with some men's being in a prosperous condition or circumstances, and others in a calamitous or suffering state.‡ He evidently supposes all along, that God doth not interpose in any thing where second causes are concerned:§ So that all agency of divine providence in disposing, governing, and overruling second causes, in which so much of the wisdom of God's providential administrations doth consist, is, upon his scheme, absolutely excluded.

Agreeably to this, he discardeth all hope or expectation of divine assistance in the practice of that which is good; though he owns, that something of this kind hath been generally believed in all religions. This is the design of a considerable part of the first section of his "Farewell to his Readers;"|| which would deserve to be particularly examined, if this were a proper place for it. I shall only observe, that what he seems to lay a principal stress upon, to set aside the notion of divine influences or assistances, is, that we have no way of certainly distinguishing them from the operations of our own minds; whereas, supposing this to be the case, all that it would prove is, not that there are no gracious assistances or influences communicated at all, but that they are ordinarily communicated in a way perfectly agreeable to the just order of our faculties, and without putting any unnatural constraint upon them.

* Posthumous Works, vol. i. p. 127. † Ibid. p. 225. ‡ Ibid. vol. i. p. 394, 395.

§ See concerning a particular providence, Woolaston's Religion of Nature delineated, p. 98, and seq.

|| Posthumous Works, vol. i. p. 114, and seq.

And as he allows no particular interposition of divine providence in human affairs, it is not to be wondered at, that he has done what he can to show, that prayer to God is no part of natural religion.* He supposes it as a thing certain, that God doth not fulfil our requests by granting what we pray for, since things will go on in their natural course, whether we pray to God or not. He owns indeed, that prayer, considered as a *positive institution*, may be of use, by *introducing proper reflections, and thereby proper affections and actions*; and provided it be made use of only for this purpose, without expecting to obtain any thing from God in consequence of it, he thinks it cannot be said to be a *mocking of God*; but yet he apprehends that even in this case, there is still an impropriety in it, and puts the question, whether such an impropriety should be a *bar to prayer*, or whether it be *displeasing to God*; and he plainly intimates, that in his opinion it is so.† I need not take particular notice of the objections he hath urged against the duty of prayer, which have been often sufficiently obviated;‡ but I think it is evident, that there is little room left, upon this author's scheme, for what hath been hitherto looked upon by the wisest and best of men to be a principal part of true piety, or of the duty we owe to God, viz. a constant religious dependence upon his wise and good providence, a thankful sense of his goodness, and gratitude to him for the benefits we receive, a patient submission and resignation to his will under afflictions, an ingenuous trust and affiance in him, and a looking up to him for his gracious assistances to help our sincere endeavours.

The doctrines concerning the immortality of the soul, and a future state of retributions, are justly regarded as important parts of natural religion, and have been acknowledged to be so by some of the deists themselves. Mr. Blount, in a letter to the right honourable and most ingenious Strephon, in the *Oracles of Reason*, says, "There are many arguments from reason and philosophy to prove the immortality of the soul, together with its rewards and punishments; but that there is no argument of greater weight with him, than the absolute necessity and convenience that it should be so, as well to complete the justice of God, as to perfect the happiness of man, not only in this world, but in that which is to come." Another deistical writer observes,§ that "to say, man's soul dies with the body is a desperate conclusion, which saps the foundation of human happiness."§ And one would think, by some passages in Mr. Chubb's book, that he was of the same opinion. He begins the first section of his *Farewell* with assuring his readers, that what he hath *principally aimed at in all his writings*, has been both to *evince*, and to *impress deeply upon their minds*, a just sense of those truths, which are of the highest concern to them; and one of those truths which he there expressly mentions is this, "that God will reward or punish

* Posthumous Works, vol. i. p. 287, &c.

† Ibid. p. 283, 284.

‡ Religion of Nature delineated, p. 125, 126. and Benson's tract On the End and Design of Prayer.

§ Letter to the Deists, p. 25, cited by Halyburton.

men in another world, according as they have by their good or bad behaviour, rendered themselves the proper objects of either in this."* He repeats this again in very strong expressions at the end of his tenth section, where he proposes to set before the reader, the *sum total*, as he expresseth it, of his principles;† and again, in what he calls his conclusion, he speaks of God's calling our species to an account for their practice and behaviour, "at which tribunal," saith he, "he will most certainly deal with me, and the rest of mankind, in justice and equity, according to the truth and reality of our respective cases." And in the very last words of his "Farewell to his Readers," which I cited before, he declares his hope "to be a sharer with them of the divine favour in that peaceful and happy state, which God hath prepared for the virtuous and faithful, in some other future world."‡

And yet, notwithstanding these express and repeated declarations concerning a future state of existence, and a future judgment and retribution, he hath taken pains to unsettle the minds of men in these important points.

In his fourth section, in which he professedly enquireth concerning a future state of existence to men, he representeth it as absolutely doubtful, whether the soul be material or immaterial; whether it be distinct from the body; and, if it be, whether it is equally perishable as the body, and shall die with it, or shall subsist after the dissolution of the body. These are points which, he says, he cannot possibly determine, because he has nothing to ground such determination upon; and at the same time he declareth, that "if the soul be perishable with the body, there can surely be no place for argument with regard to a future state of existence to men, or a future retribution, because when the human frame is once dissolved by death, then man ceases to be, and is no more."§ In what follows, he declares himself quite unsatisfied with the arguments which are brought to prove, that the soul is not material, or that matter is not capable of intelligence; and though he doth not take upon him expressly to determine that point, it is easy to see that he inclineth most to the materialists;|| and after having declared, that the philosophical arguments and reasonings on this head are too abstract and subtle for him to understand, and that therefore he cannot form any judgment about them, nor draw any conclusion from them, he adds, that divine revelation does not afford a proper ground of certainty with respect to man's future existence, because we cannot come to any certainty with regard to the divine original of any external revelation.¶ He finds fault with St. Paul for saying, that *life and immortality are brought to light by the gospel*, and will not allow that the resurrection of Christ, supposing it true, though he takes a great deal of pains to show that it is not so, proves either the possibility or certainty of a resurrection and a future state.** Thus it appears, that, in this section, where he professedly treateth of a future state

* Posthumous Works, vol. i. p. 97, 99.

† Ibid. vol. ii. p. 348, 349.

‡ Ibid. p. 355. § Ibid. vol. i. p. 312, 313.

|| Ibid. p. 317, 318, 324, 326.

¶ Ibid. p. 327, 328.

** Ibid. p. 333, and seq.

of existence to men, he does all he can to render it absolutely uncertain, and to show that no proof can be given of it, either from reason or revelation; and yet, that he may make a show of saying something, he concludes this section with observing, that from man's being an accountable creature, there arises a probability, that there will be a future state of existence to men; the farther consideration of which he reserves for the following section, which is concerning a future judgment and retribution.

In this therefore, which is his fifth section, the reader might perhaps expect some determination of this point; and yet, though this is a pretty long section, the proper subject of which is the future judgment, it is managed in such a manner, as to leave the reader at an uncertainty about it, and as much at a loss as before. He begins indeed with observing, that "man, by his faculties and endowments, is an accountable creature, accountable for his behaviour to all whom it may concern, namely, to the intelligent world, and also to the Deity, who is the most perfect intelligence."* But he absolutely discards the proof that is drawn from the present unequal distributions of divine providence. This argument he states very unfairly, and endeavours to place it in a ridiculous light. He compares men's different conditions here on earth to that of horses, some of whom meet with bad masters, and others happen to have good ones; and pretends, the argument would equally conclude for a future retribution with regard to all other animals, as it does for the species of mankind;† but, admitting there will be a future retribution, he thinks it may be doubted, whether it shall be universally extended to all our species. He plainly intimates, that, in his opinion, those who die in their youth will not be called into judgment, nor those who act a very low part in life; and he seems to think, that those only shall be called to an account whose lives have been of much greater consequence to the world, and who have been greatly subservient to the public good, or hurt of mankind:‡ So that, according to his representation of the case, supposing there were to be a future judgment and retribution, it is what the generality of mankind would have little concern in. And as, upon his scheme, there are but few who shall be called to an account, so it is but for some particular actions that they shall be accountable. He observes, that no man ever intended to do dishonour to God, or to be injurious to him, however foolishly they may have used the names or terms by which the Deity is characterized; and that therefore there will be no enquiry at the last judgment about such offences as these; i. e. about blasphemies against God. The only offence man can be guilty of against God is, he thinks, the want of a just sense of his kindness and beneficence, and the not making a public profession of gratitude to him; but whether this will make a part of the grand inquest, he declares himself certainly unable to judge; and he plainly insinuates, that in his opinion it will not; since "among men it has been looked upon to be a mark of greatness of soul, rather to despise and over-

* Posthumous Works, vol. i. p. 387. † Ibid. p. 395. ‡ Ibid. p. 400.

look such ingratitude, than to show any resentment of it."* The only thing, therefore, for which he supposes men shall be accountable, is for the injuries or benefits they do to one another; and even as to these, he seems not to allow, that the good or evil particular persons do to one another, will come into judgment, but only "the good or bad part men act, by voluntarily contributing to the good or hurt of the commonweal."† He afterwards setteth himself to show, that things would be as well ordered in the world without the supposition and expectation of a future judgment, as with it; that men's duties and obligations would still be the same, and so would the motives to adhere to virtue, and to avoid vice; nor is the belief of it of any great advantage to society:‡ To all which it may be added, that here again, in treating concerning a future judgment, he takes care to repeat what he had said in the foregoing section, viz. that if the soul be perishable, and is dissolved with the body, then this world seems to be *man's all*, and that on such a supposition, a *resurrection* or *restoration*, and a *future retribution*, seem to be excluded; and at the same time he declareth, that whether the soul perisheth with the body or not, is a thing which admitteth of no proof.§ So that, upon the whole, he really leaveth it as a matter quite uncertain, whether there shall be a future judgment or not; and yet, when he has a mind to make a boast of the good tendency of his principles, he is for making a merit of it, that it is one of those important truths, which he has taken pains to inculcate on the minds of men.

I have insisted the longer upon these things, that I may unmask the fair pretences of this author, who sets up for an uncommon degree of openness and candour. His admirers may hence see how consistent he is, and how far his professions are to be depended on.

I shall now consider what he hath offered in this his solemn *Farewell to his Readers*, with regard to revealed religion.

As to revelation in general, he seems to make a very fair concession. "When men (saith he) are sunk into gross ignorance and error, and are greatly vitiated in their affections and actions, then God may, for any reason I can see to the contrary, kindly interpose, by a special application of his power and providence, and reveal to men such useful truths as otherwise they might be ignorant of, or might not attend to; and also lay before them such rules of life as they ought to walk by; and likewise press their obedience with proper motives, and thereby lead them to repentance and reformation."|| But, as he was afraid that in this he had made too large a concession, he adds, "but then that it is so, and when it is so, will in the nature of the thing be matter of doubt and disputation." And in his sixth section, where he treateth expressly of revelation, he asserteth, that, in what way soever God communicateth knowledge to men, "it must be a matter of uncertainty, whether the revelation be divine or not, because we have no rule to judge, or from

* Posthumous Works, vol. i. p. 391, 392.
† Ibid. p. 401, 410.

§ Ibid. p. 399.

† Ibid. p. 395, 397.

|| Ibid. p. 292, 293.

which we can with certainty distinguish divine revelation from delusion;" and that if this be the case with those who receive the revelation at first hand, then surely it must be uncertain to those who receive it from them.* Thus, though he seems to grant that God may on some occasions *kindly interpose by a special application of his power and providence*, to reveal to men useful truths, and to direct and excite them to their duty; yet he will not allow that he can communicate the knowledge of his will in such a way, as to give them a sufficient satisfying assurance that it is a divine revelation, and came from him. This is a most presumptuous and unreasonable limitation of the divine power and wisdom, and is in effect the same thing as to say, that he cannot communicate any revelation of his will to mankind at all; even though his goodness should dispose him to do so, and their circumstances should require it. Dr. Tindal had in effect said the same thing with our author; and what he offered to this purpose was fully considered and obviated in the answers that were made to him.†

From the question concerning revelation in general, Mr. Chubb proceeds, in his sixth section, to make some observations on the Jewish, Mahometan, and Christian revelation in particular.

The first of these he absolutely rejecteth. He pretends, that God's moral character is sullied by it; that St. Peter and St. Paul condemn it as unworthy of the Deity; that it had a vast multiplicity of rites and ceremonies, which he supposes to be perfectly arbitrary, and instituted without any reason at all; that it represents God as acting partially, in choosing the Jewish nation to be a peculiar people; and that, in that constitution, a twelfth part of the people lived idly on the labour of the rest; that the appearances of God to the patriarchs, to Moses, &c. could only belong to a local circumscribed deity; and that the God of Israel was not the Supreme Being, but only some tutelar subordinate god, consonant to the pagan idolatry; and that his conduct in ordering the Israelites to extirpate the Canaanites was inconsistent with the moral character of the Deity. This is the sum of what he urges, for several pages together in his sixth section, with regard to the Jewish revelation.‡ And he had insisted upon the same things before at greater length in his second section,§ where he also condemns the punishing idolatry with death under the Jewish constitution as unjust, and as tending to justify persecution for conscience' sake. These, and other objections to the same purpose, had been urged with great vivacity by Dr. Morgan, in his "Moral Philosopher," and were fully considered and obviated in the first and second volumes of "The divine Authority of the Old and New Testament asserted." Mr. Chubb has thought fit to repeat the objections, without giving any new strength to them that I can find, or taking off the force of the answers which had been returned.

* Posthumous Works, vol. ii. p. 5.

† Conybeare's Defence of Revealed Religion, chap. vii. Answer to Christianity as old as the Creation, vol. ii. chap. 1.

‡ Posthumous Works, vol. ii. p. 19—29.

§ Ibid. vol. i. p. 189—231.

Referring therefore to what I have more largely insisted upon in the books now mentioned, I shall at present only observe in brief, that the idea given of God in the Jewish Scriptures, of his greatness and majesty, of his power and wisdom, of his justice, goodness, and purity, and of his universal presence and dominion, is the noblest that can be conceived by the human mind, and the most fitted to produce holy affections and dispositions towards him: That nothing can be more evident, than that the God proposed to the Jews, as the proper object of their worship, is the one living and true God, the sovereign Lord of the universe, who created all things by his power, who preserveth and governeth all things by his providence: That as to the divine appearances mentioned in the Old Testament, no argument can be brought to prove, that the sovereign Lord of the universe may not see fit on some occasions to exhibit himself by a visible external glory and splendour, in order to strike men with a more strong and lively sense of his immediate presence; or that he may not in that case make use of a glorious subordinate being or beings of an order superior to man; and some such beings have been acknowledged by the best and wisest men in all ages, in delivering messages in his name: That it is no way inconsistent with God's universal care and providence towards mankind, to make extraordinary discoveries of his will to particular persons, or to a people, or to give them wise and excellent laws, and establish a constitution among them, the fundamental principle of which is the acknowledgment and adoration of the one living and true God, in opposition to all idolatry. Nor is there the least shadow of reason to prove, that he could not in such a case make the observance of this the principal condition on which the national privileges and benefits he thought fit to confer upon that people should be suspended; in which case, whosoever was guilty of idolatry under that peculiar constitution, was justly obnoxious to the penalties inflicted upon the enemies and subverters of the community. That as to God's choosing the people of Israel, they not only proceeded from ancestors, eminent for piety and virtue, and pure adorers of the Deity, but may be justly supposed, at the time of God's erecting that sacred polity among them, to have been, notwithstanding all their faults, freer from idolatry and other vices than any of the neighbouring nations. They seem to have been much better than the people of Egypt, from whence they were delivered; or than the Canaanites, whose land was given them, and who appear to have been a most wicked and abandoned race of men, universally guilty, not only of the grossest idolatries, but of the most monstrous vices and abominations of all kinds. And if God saw fit on that occasion to order them to be extirpated, as a monument to all ages of his just detestation of such crimes and vices, this cannot be proved to be inconsistent with the character of the wise and righteous governor of the world; though our author represents this as a millstone that hangs at the neck of the Mosaic dispensation. With respect to the laws that were given to the people of Israel, those of a moral nature, of which there is a comprehensive summary in the Ten Command-

ments, are unquestionably holy and excellent ; the judicial laws are wise and equitable ; and the positive precepts, though many and various, wisely suited to the state and circumstances of that time and people. The reasons of several of them may be assigned even at this distance ; and that there were very proper reasons for the rest may be justly supposed. And St. Peter and St. Paul, even when they represent them as burdensome, plainly show, that they look upon them to have been originally instituted for wise ends, though no longer to be observed, when a more perfect dispensation was introduced, to which they were designed to be subservient. The appointing the Priests and Levites, and distributing them among the other tribes, is so far from being a just objection against that constitution, that it may be justly regarded as a wise and excellent institution, well fitted for preserving and spreading the knowledge of religion, and the law among the people, and instructing them in their duty ; and the provision made for them was justly due, both as a reward for their service, and as an equivalent for their not having had a distinct portion and share of the land assigned them with the other tribes. Finally, the Mosaic constitution was attended at its first establishment with the most glorious and amazing demonstrations of a divine power and majesty, and which plainly shewed an extraordinary divine interposition ; and these facts were done not in secret, but in the most open public manner, of which the whole nation were witnesses ; and the memory of them constantly preserved, both by solemn public memorials, and in authentic records, which have all the characters of genuine antiquity, simplicity, and a sincere regard to truth, and have been always regarded by the whole nation with the profoundest veneration. Nor is there any just foundation for the author's pretence, that the sacred history was entirely in the hands of the priests, or that from Solomon's time to the Babylonish captivity none had access to it but the high-priest, and that in that captivity their law was entirely destroyed and lost ;* a supposition that has been frequently repeated by the deistical writers, though the absurdity of it has been fully exposed.

Though Mr. Chubb hath absolutely rejected the Jewish revelation, he speaks very favourably of that of Mahomet.† Among other instances of his regard to it, he takes upon him to pronounce, that "it cannot surely be true, that the great prevalence of Mahometanism was owing to its being propagated by the sword ; because it must have prevailed to a very great degree before the sword could have been drawn in its favour." And yet it is a thing capable of the clearest proof, that Mahometanism from its first appearance was propagated by the sword. This was what Mahomet himself most expressly required and recommended, and he accordingly spread his religion considerably by force of arms in his life-time ; and immediately after his death, the chief apostles of Mahometanism were captains and mighty generals, who spread their conquests far and

* Posthumous Works, vol. ii. p. 26, 27.

† Ibid. p. 30, &c.

wide. Our author concludes his account of Mahometanism with saying, "whether the Mahometan revelation be of a divine original, or not, there seems to be a plausible pretence, arising from the circumstances of things, for stamping a divine character upon it."*

As to the Christian revelation, it is evident he has done all in his power to expose it; and yet he seems plainly to acknowledge Christ's divine mission. "That there was such a person as Jesus Christ, and that he, in the main, did and taught as is recorded of him, appears (saith he) to be probable, because it is improbable that Christianity should take place in the way and to the degree it did, or at least that we are told it did, supposing the history of Christ's life and ministry to be a fiction." He adds, that "if such power attended Jesus Christ in the exercise of his ministry, as the history sets forth, then seeing his ministry and the power that attended it seems, at least in general, to have terminated in the public good, it is more likely that God was the primary agent in the exercise of that power, than any other invisible being. And then it is probable, that Jesus Christ, upon whose will the immediate exercise of that power depended, would not use that power to impose upon and mislead mankind to their hurt, seeing that power appears to have been well directed and applied in other respects, and seeing he was accountable to his principal for the abuse of it." He adds—"from these premises, or from this general view of the case, I think this conclusion follows, viz. it is probable Christ's mission was divine; at least it appears so to me from the light or information I have received concerning it."† And as he seems here to acknowledge Christ's mission to be divine, so he undertakes to give an account what was the subject of his mission, or what it was that he was sent to publish to the world. This he reduceth to three main principles, for which he referreth to a tract he had formerly published, entitled, "The true Gospel of Christ," viz. 1. That nothing but a conformity of mind and life to the eternal rule of righteousness will render men acceptable to God. 2. That when men have deviated from that rule, nothing but a thorough repentance and reformation will render them the proper objects of God's mercy. And lastly, that God will judge the world in righteousness, and will render to every man according as his works shall be. He adds, that these propositions seem to him to contain the sum and substance of Christ's ministry; and as they are altogether worthy of the Deity, so, he thinks, they may with propriety and truth be called, *the Gospel of Jesus Christ*. This is what he declares in his second volume, p. 82, 83; and he had said the same thing before, vol. i. p. 98, 99, where he observes, that "these things contain the substance of what Christ was in a special manner sent of God to acquaint the world with." And again he declares, that by Christianity he means, "that revelation of God's will which Christ was in a special and particular manner sent to acquaint the world with; and as far as the writings of the apostles are consonant with it, they

* Posthumous Works, vol. ii. p. 42. † Ibid. p. 41—43. compared with p. 394—396.

come under the denomination of Christianity:”* where he seems fairly to own, that Christ was sent in a *particular and special manner to acquaint the world with a revelation of God’s will*. He also acknowledges, that “the writings of the apostles contain excellent cautions, advices, and instructions, which serve for the right conducting our affections and actions: That the Christian revelation, one would hope, was kindly intended to guide men’s understandings into the knowledge of those truths, in which their highest interest is concerned, and to engage them to be justly affected therewith, and act accordingly; and that it naturally tends to reform the vices, and rightly to direct the affections and behaviour of men.” And finally, “that it may perhaps be a piece of justice due to Christianity (could it be certainly determined what it is, and could it be separated from every thing that hath been blended with it), to acknowledge that it yields a much clearer light, and is a more safe guide to mankind, than any other traditionary religion, as being better adapted to improve and perfect human nature.”†

These things would naturally lead us to think, that he had a friendly design towards Christianity and the holy Scriptures. But, notwithstanding all these specious professions, whosoever reads what he calls his “Farewell to his Readers,” with ever so little attention, must be convinced, that the principal design of it was to subvert the credit and divine authority of the Christian revelation.

Though he declares, that he looks upon it to be probable that Christ’s mission was divine, yet he has taken great pains to show, that the proofs which are brought for it are not at all to be depended upon. Having observed, that the two principal arguments or evidences usually insisted on to prove the divine original of the Christian revelation are prophecy and miracles, he uses his utmost efforts to invalidate both these: two long sections of his “Farewell to his Readers” are employed this way, *viz.* the seventh and eighth: and as to the resurrection of Christ, he labours for nearly fifty pages together to represent it as an absurd and incredible thing.‡

In his ninth section, in which he proposes to treat of the personal character of Jesus Christ, he does all he can to expose the account given of his being born of a virgin, as a fiction.§ And whereas Christ is represented as having been perfect, and without sin, he will have it to be understood, not that he was absolutely sinless, but that no public or gross miscarriages could be charged upon him.|| The highest character he seems willing to allow him is, that he was the “founder of the Christian sect,”¶ or, as he elsewhere expresseth it, that he “collected a body of disciples, and laid a foundation for a new sect among the Jews;”** for he supposes, that, according to Jesus’s original intention, Christianity was only designed to be a *supplement* to Judaism, and that the Mosaical constitution was to continue always in full force, and that his gospel was to be preached

* Posthumous Works, vol. ii. p. 346.

† Ibid. p. 297, 344, 347, 370.

‡ Ibid. vol. i. p. 333, &c.

§ Ibid. vol. ii. p. 268—285.

|| Ibid. vol. ii. p. 269.

¶ Ibid. vol. i. p. 50.

** Ibid. vol. ii. p. 395.

only to the Jews in all nations, and not to the Gentiles at all, though the apostles afterwards deviated from his plan.* He owns indeed, that he advanced some proper precepts of his own, in which he seemed to correct the constitutions of Moses; but he endeavours to show, that in these he made alterations for the worse, and that those precepts by which he is thought to have been most distinguished, instead of being more excellent than those of other teachers and law-givers, are really less excellent, and less perfect; and, if taken in their proper and natural sense, are contrary to the reason of things, and inconsistent with the welfare and happiness of mankind. This is the principal design he appears to have had in view, in what he calls "Remarks on the Scriptures;" which is the first tract in his "Posthumous Works."

In some of the passages above cited, he seems to give a favourable account of Christianity, and proceeds so far as to specify what the true gospel of Christ is, and what that message is, which he allows Christ was sent of God to deliver to the world; yet in plain contradiction to himself, he asserts in several parts of his book, that it is utterly uncertain what message Christ was sent to publish to the world, or wherein true Christianity doth consist. This is what he particularly endeavoureth to show in his sixth section.† And in that very passage before cited, where he pretends that it is a *piece of justice due to Christianity*, to acknowledge, that it *yields a much clearer light*, and is a *more safe guide than any other traditional religion*, he at the same time insinuates, that it *cannot be defined or determined what Christianity is.*‡ He asserts, that "it has been so loosely and indeterminately delivered to the world, that nothing but contention and confusion has attended it from its first promulgation to this time; and that the books of the New Testament have been so far from being a remedy to this evil, that they have contributed to it."§ Accordingly, he expressly calls the New Testament, that *fountain of confusion and contradiction.*|| And whereas Mr. Chillingworth had said, that *the Bible is the religion of Protestants*, Mr. Chubb thinks, that "unless it be so interpreted as to be made conformable to the great rule of right and wrong, which, he says, in some instances cannot be done without force and violence, it must be an unsafe guide to mankind;"¶ and that to appeal to Scripture "would be a certain way to perplexity and dissatisfaction, but not to find out the truth."** And before this he had said, that "the Bible has been the grand source of heresies and schisms; and that it exhibits doctrines seemingly the most opposite, some of which are greatly dishonourable to God, others the most injurious to men."†† I think it is not easy to give a worse idea of the Scriptures than this author has done. If his account of them be a just one, it must be very dangerous to read them; and it would be a kindness to keep them out of the hands of the people; for he seems directly to charge all this upon the Scriptures themselves, and not upon the fault of

* Posthumous Works, vol. ii. p. 85, 86, 168. † Ibid. p. 72—122. ‡ Ibid. p. 370.
 § Ibid. p. 57, 315. || Ibid. p. 246, 247. ¶ Ibid. p. 326. ** Ibid. p. 335.
 †† Ibid. vol. i. p. 6, 57.

those that pervert and abuse them. And yet this very consistent writer declares against *locking up the Bible from the people*, and that "this is most unsafe, as it has put the people so far under the power of the clergy, as to involve them in the most gross ignorance and superstition, and the most absolute slavery both in civil and religious matters."* Is not this plainly to acknowledge, that the being well acquainted with the holy Scriptures is one of the best preservatives against ignorance, priestcraft, and superstition, and a great advantage and security to truth and liberty? And what then must we think of the attempt made by him and other deistical writers to expose and vilify the holy Scriptures, and destroy all veneration for them in the minds of men, which, if believed, must induce an absolute neglect, and even contempt, of those sacred writings? Ought not this, by his own acknowledgment, to be regarded as an attempt to bring us back into the *most gross ignorance, superstition, and slavery*?

As a farther proof of the author's good-will towards Christianity, it may be observed, that he represents it as savouring of enthusiasm; and he explains enthusiasm to be "a groundless persuasion, that the Deity dictates and impresses upon the mind of the promulger the subject-matter of his ministry, and therefore such ministry is supposed to be not of or from men, but of and from God."† And as he here supposes Christianity to be the product of enthusiasm so he elsewhere charges the apostles and first publishers of Christianity with imposture. He represents them as capable of giving a *false testimony* to serve the Christian cause, and that they acted upon this principle, "that truth in some cases may and ought to be dispensed with, and made to give way to falsehood and dissimulation;" and upon this he asks, "How then will the miracles wrought by Jesus Christ and his apostles be proved to be other than impostures? supposing them to be much better attested than at present they appear to be."‡

These and other things that might be mentioned may let us into the true spirit and design of this writer, and may help us to judge of the protestations he has made with great solemnity in the conclusion of his "Farewell to his Readers." "If any say, that what I have written is out of disrespect to the person and ministry of Jesus Christ, the accusation is false." And he adds, "as upon the Christian scheme, Jesus Christ will be the judge of quick and dead, so I assure my readers, that in this view and upon this consideration, I have no disagreeable apprehension on account of any thing that I have published to the world."§

Having given this general idea of our author's work, I shall in my next letter offer some remarks upon those parts of his book which may seem to require a more particular consideration.

* Posthumous Works, vol. ii. p. 327. 345.

† Ibid. p. 92, 93. 130, 131. 230, 231.

‡ Ibid. p. 49. 53.

§ Ibid. p. 533.

LETTER XIV.

Some farther Remarks on Mr. Chubb's *Posthumous Works*—The unfair Representation he makes of our Saviour's Precepts in his Sermon on the Mount.—His gross Perversions of Scripture.—His Charge against it, as uncertain, and as having been greatly depraved and corrupted by the Church of Rome, considered.—Observations upon the Attempt he makes to invalidate the Proof from Prophecy and Miracles.—The Parallel he draws between the Propagation of Christianity and the Progress of Methodism examined.—The Falsehood of his Pretence, that the Apostles quite changed the original Plan of Christianity, and that they laid a Scheme for worldly Wealth and Power.—His Invectives against St. Paul malicious and unjust.—He represents all Religions to be alike with regard to the Favour of God, and pretends to direct Men to an infallible Guide.

SIR,

IN my last, I gave a general account of Mr. Chubb's posthumous treatises. I shall now add some farther observations relating to some parts of those tracts which may seem to deserve to be more particularly considered.

Of this kind is the attempt he hath made to expose our Saviour's precepts in his admirable sermon on the mount, which is designed to teach the most pure and excellent morality. In several of these precepts, our Lord evidently maketh use of a proverbial way of speaking, short and comprehensive aphorisms, delivered in phrases, some of which may perhaps appear not so usual among us, but which were familiar to those to whom they were at first delivered. Every one knows, that, in such cases, every expression is not to be taken in the utmost strictness, but the general intention is to be regarded, which is plain enough to an honest and attentive mind. But this writer seems resolved to take them in the most absurd sense he can possibly put upon them. Thus, he interprets the precept against resisting evil, which is manifestly intended to check and suppress private revenge, and to teach us that wise lesson, "that it is better in many cases, patiently to bear injuries, especially in smaller instances, than to give way to a keen and forward resentment and retaliation of them," as if it were designed absolutely, and in all cases, to forbid us to shun our guard against the evils and injuries offered to us, and required us rather to expose ourselves to those evils. But this certainly could not be the intention of that excellent teacher, who exhorteth his disciples to be *wise as serpents* in avoiding evil, as well as *innocent as doves*; and directeth them, instead of needlessly exposing themselves, when *persecuted in one city, to flee unto another*. The precept about loving our enemies is designed to restrain and heal that bitter and malevolent spirit which men are so apt to indulge, and to carry benevolence to the noblest height. It teacheth us, that no private enmities or disgusts should cause us to forget the common ties of humanity: that with regard to our enemies themselves, we should be earpestly desirous of their amendment and true happiness, and should be ready, when a proper opportunity

offers, to do them good offices, and to overcome their enmity with kindness, which is the noblest victory. But our candid author would have it to be understood to signify, that we should put no difference in our affection and esteem between good and bad men, but should have an equal complacency in persons of the vilest characters as in those of the best.* And because our Saviour speaks of God's doing good, in the methods of his common providence, even to the unthankful and the evil, he pretends, that, according to his representation, the perfection of the Supreme Being consisteth in his being affected towards all intelligent beings alike, and showing equal love and favour to the righteous and to the wicked; than which nothing can be more contrary to Christ's manifest intention, and to the whole tenor of his teaching and ministry. Our Lord's excellent discourse against anxious cares, and a distracting or distrustful thoughtfulness for to-morrow, he interprets as designed to recommend *thoughtlessness and indolence*, and absolutely to forbid that *thoughtfulness and industry, which man's present indigent condition, and the present constitution of things make necessary*.† And the precept by which we are directed *not to lay up for ourselves treasures on earth*, but to lay up for ourselves *treasures in heaven*, which is plainly intended to check a too eager pursuit of worldly riches, and a placing our chief happiness in these things, he represents as if it were designed absolutely to condemn all worldly acquisitions, however lawfully obtained, and well used and employed. In like manner, he interprets what our Saviour says in a parabolical way, Luke xvi. 12, 13. concerning inviting the poor, the blind, and the lame; and which, as may be gathered from the context by comparing ver. 7, &c. was designed to rebuke the vanity of expensive and ostentatious entertainments, whilst the poor and indigent were neglected; as if it were his intention, that all Christians should deny themselves the pleasure of ever entertaining, or being entertained by friends, relations, and those of their own rank, and were to confine themselves wholly to the company, conversation, and friendship of the *poor*, the *maimed*, the *lame*, and the *blind*:‡ though it is very evident from his own practice, that our Lord Jesus was far from discouraging an agreeable intercourse and conversation among friends, and the offices and entertainments of the social life; and I dare say, not one either of the Jews, or of his own disciples, ever understood him in this sense.

But Mr. Chubb takes upon him to pronounce, that these and the like precepts are all to be understood in the most strict literal sense, and do not admit of *any limitation*, or any palliating interpretation to be put upon them; and he represents them as the proper precepts of Christianity, *peculiar*, as he expresseth it, to the *Christian sect*, and in *which their founder's honour is peculiarly concerned*; and pretends, that the observance of these alone, in the absurd sense he puts upon them, is what constitutes a true Christian. And as these are the precepts that are acknowledged to be peculiarly Christian, he

* Posthumous Works, vol. i. p. 18, 19. † Ibid. p. 22, 23. ‡ Ibid. p. 25, 26.

thinks that from thence a judgment may be formed, whether there be any just ground for boasting, that Christian morals are much more excellent and perfect, than any other system of morals that hath been exhibited to men.*

Nothing can possibly be more unfair and disingenuous, than this conduct of our author. No man of candour, who considers the deep wisdom and good sense which appeareth in our Saviour's discourses, can reasonably suppose, that it was his intention to recommend such absurd instructions and advices as they must have been, according to this writer's representation of them. Our Lord's design, in his excellent sermon on the mount, was not, as he himself declares, to destroy the law and the prophets; it was to vindicate them from the narrow and corrupt glosses of the Jewish doctors. And what could be more worthy of a teacher sent from God, the great Saviour and lover of mankind, than to forbid the being angry without a cause, all injurious and reproachful expressions, all adultery and impurity, even in heart and thought; and to recommend purity, charity, meekness, benevolence, the forgiveness of injuries, and even a rendering good for evil, and overcoming evil with good? to warn men against an excessive love of worldly riches, which hath in all ages been the source of numberless evils and disorders among mankind, and engage them to raise their affections and views to things of a far higher and nobler nature, things celestial and eternal? to direct men to a calm contentment and dependance on divine providence, in every condition, as the best preservative against those anxious distracting cares and solitudes, which, when they prevail, destroy the relish of life? What our Saviour hath delivered on these, and on other heads of great importance to the happiness of mankind, is comprehended in short maxims, strongly and closely expressed, which makes them more apt to strike, and more easily remembered; but without descending to particular exceptions and limitations, which, for the most part, common sense, and the nature of the thing, easily direct to. He, who was perfectly acquainted with human nature, very well knew, that there was no great danger of men's taking them in too strict a sense, and that they would be forward enough to find out limitations for themselves. And any one that impartially considers the variety of matters treated of, in that excellent sermon on the mount, such a vast extent of pure and noble morals comprised in so small a compass, and delivered with the most comprehensive brevity, will be apt to admire the wisdom of this heavenly teacher, and to have a just dislike of a writer that could turn those admirable lessons to the disadvantage of the holy Jesus and the Christian religion. And I am persuaded, that any man who should treat the maxims and wise sayings of the philosophers or great men of antiquity, as this author has done those of our Saviour, would be regarded by all rational and thinking men among the Deists themselves, as a rude and impertinent caviller. What renders Mr. Chubb more inexcusable is, that he himself seems to have been very

* Posthumous Works, vol. i. p. 27, 28. 31. 39, 40.

sensible, that those precepts were not intended in the sense he has thought fit to put upon them; for though, in what he calls "Remarks on the Scriptures," he contends, as hath been shown, that no other interpretation ought to be admitted, yet in another part of his "Posthumous Works," viz. in the ninth section of his "Farewell," where he professes to treat concerning the personal character of Jesus Christ, he produces these very precepts as instances of Christ's figurative way of speaking, and plainly owns, that they ought not to be taken, nor were originally intended, in the strict literal sense he had put upon them. To this purpose he particularly mentions the precepts of not resisting evil, of loving our enemies, and giving to every one that asketh;* and from thence concludes, that we must use our reason in judging of the sense of Scripture, and of our Saviour's precepts; which will be readily allowed. The Scripture undoubtedly supposeth us to be reasonable creatures, and our Saviour addresseth himself to us as such; but it by no means follows, as he insinuates, that because we are to use our understandings in judging of the sense of Scripture, and all laws, that therefore our own reason could guide us as well without them, and that these precepts are of no use, and that it is of no advantage to have them enforced by a divine authority.

It may not be improper on this occasion to take notice of some other of his gross perversions of Scripture. A signal instance of this kind we have in the same tract, in which he makes so strange a representation of several of our Saviour's precepts. Speaking of that noted passage, 1 John ii. 1, 2, "My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not; and if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and he is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world." He observes, that "this passage may be supposed to bespeak comfort and safety to a wicked Christian, i. e. to a wicked man who is a believer in Jesus Christ, and professes discipleship to him; and that it is but for a man to apply these words of John to himself, and "the practice of vice is made easy to him."† That this could not possibly be St. John's meaning in this passage, is evident from the whole tenour of his epistle, and particularly from the words immediately following, in which he declares, "hereby we do know that we know him," i. e. Jesus Christ, "if we keep his commandments. He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him," ver. 3, 4. Our author himself is sensible, that the interpretation he hath given of this passage is not consistent with what St. John hath said in other parts of his epistle. But that gives him no concern; it will only show that St. John contradicts himself; which is what he would have him thought to do; and therefore with an unparalleled assurance he insisteth upon it, that the account he hath given of St. John's meaning, is the true one, "whatever St. John, or any other writer of the New Testament, in opposition to this, may have

* Posthumous Works, vol. ii. p. 289, 293, 294, &c.

† Ibid. vol. i. p. 37, 38.

elsewhere said to the contrary." His manner of expressing himself plainly shows, that he is resolved this shall be St. John's sense, contrary to his own most express declarations, and to the entire strain of the New Testament; because he thinks it tends to expose Christianity, though in reality by such a procedure he has only exposed himself. But he urgeth, that "if Christ be the propitiation for all sins, then the most wicked Christian must needs be in a safe and comfortable state; and even wicked pagans and infidels, as well as Christians, penitent and impenitent, because God would not be so unreasonable and unjust, as to take double satisfaction for the same offences." And in some other parts of his book, he inveighs against the doctrine of Christ's being the propitiation for sins, as contrary to truth, and the eternal reason of things.* But in all that he has said on this head, he either discovers a gross ignorance of the Scripture-doctrine of Christ's being the propitiation for our sins, or makes a wilful misrepresentation of it; since nothing can be more evident than it is from the whole New Testament, that Christ's dying for our sins was not designed to free men from an obligation to holiness and obedience, but rather to lay them under stronger engagements to it; and that according to the gospel covenant, none can expect an interest in the benefits arising from Christ's sufferings and sacrifice, or from his mediation and intercession, but those that turn from their sins by a sincere repentance, and who submit to be governed by his holy and most excellent laws. The doctrine of Christ's satisfaction, rightly understood, is so far from giving the least encouragement to sin, that it tendeth to impress men's hearts with the deepest sense of the heinous evils and malignity of sin, and of God's just displeasure against it. Not only do those who teach that doctrine as delivered in the Scriptures, insist as strongly as any others upon the necessity of repentance and personal holiness, in order to their acceptance with God, but they maintain, that at the same time that God promiseth pardon to the truly penitent, he taketh care to dispense the pardon in such a way, as to make an awful declaration of his hatred against sin, and to vindicate the authority of his government and laws. What can have a greater tendency to prevent our abusing his pardoning mercy, and to excite in us a holy fear of offending him, than to consider that he would not receive even penitent sinners to his grace and favour, without a sacrifice of infinite virtue offered up on their behalf, consisting in the perfect obedience and sufferings of the great Mediator? And that it was upon the merit of his obedience and sufferings, that that covenant was founded and established, in which God hath graciously engaged to accept of our repentance, and to reward our sincere though imperfect obedience with eternal life?

Many other instances might be mentioned of Mr. Chubb's strange glosses upon Scripture. He seems particularly to take pleasure in misrepresenting and exposing the writings of St. Paul. Thus, because that great apostle, in arguing against the false Jewish teachers,

* Posthumous Works, vol. i. p. 250, and vol. ii. p. 112, 113, 304.

who insisted upon the observance of the Mosaic law and ceremonies, as absolutely necessary to salvation under the gospel, urgeth, that, if they were *justified by the law*, they were *fallen from grace*, i. e. from the grace of the gospel, and the way of justification there proposed, Gal. v. 4. he charges him with maintaining in the height of his zeal, that "obedience to the law of Moses was incompatible with salvation;" and that let men otherwise be ever so good and excellent persons, this error concerning the obligation of the Mosaic law would exclude them from the favour of God, and from eternal salvation. *And in this*, saith he, *the Apostle must surely have greatly erred*.* But it ought to be considered, that those Jewish teachers, whom St. Paul there opposes, are represented as men of corrupt minds, who acted from worldly and sinister ends and views, and who were not strict in keeping the law themselves, though they were for binding it upon others, Gal. vi. 12, 13. And the apostle there expressly declareth, that in Christ Jesus, or under the gospel dispensation, "neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision," i. e. neither the observance nor non-observance of these outward rites, *but faith which worketh by love*, or, as he elsewhere expresseth it, the *new creature*, i. e. a real sanctifying change of heart and life. See Gal. v. 6. vi. 15. 1 Cor. vii. 19. Again, he pretends, that St. Paul represents the calling of the Gentiles as not originally designed by God, or as an effect of his goodness towards the Gentiles, but as springing only from his having *taken up a pique or resentment against the Jews*, which, he says, "is a spring of action much too low, and altogether unworthy of the supreme Deity."† But nothing is more evident than that this apostle frequently ascribes the calling of the Gentiles to the free grace and gratuitous favour of God, and speaks of it in noble terms, as having been designed in the councils of the divine wisdom and love before the foundation of the world, Eph. i. 3, 4, 5, 6. iii. 8, 9. Farther to expose that excellent apostle, he represents it, as if in saying, that "if in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most miserable," 1 Cor. xv. 19. he intended to signify, that the practice of piety and virtue is not in its own nature so eligible, or so conducive to the real satisfaction of this present life, as that of vice and sin. Nor will he allow that St. Paul in this part of the argument has any reference to the case of persecution; and yet certain it is, that he most expressly refers to it, ver. 29, 30, 31, 32; and his evident design is to signify the unhappy condition Christians would be reduced to, under the grievous persecutions to which they were then exposed, if it were not for their future hopes. But he especially finds great fault with St. Paul for his doctrine concerning subjection to the higher powers, Rom. xiii. 1. 6. as if it were calculated for promoting tyranny and slavery. This he insists upon for several pages together, in two different parts of his Posthumous Works; and yet the apostle's doctrine, rightly considered, is admirable. He shows, that obedience to the civil powers is a duty which Christianity enjoins; that it was not

* Posthumous Works, vol. ii. p. 96, 97.

† Ibid. p. 88.

designed to exempt men from subjection to their lawful governors, though heathens, or to relax the bands of civil duty and allegiance. He doth not meddle with the questions concerning the rights of Senates, or particular forms of polity, but speaks of the duty of private persons, and therefore presses their obedience and subjection, without restrictions and limitations; and to have mentioned such restrictions would certainly have been of bad consequence; especially considering the seditious dispositions of the Jews, and how they were then affected. But our author is not willing to allow, that religion has any thing to do with obedience to our civil governors; and, in express opposition to St. Paul, declares, that government cannot be said to be the ordinance, or by the appointment of God. He maintains, that the proper argument for obliging men to subjection and obedience is, not government's being the ordinance of God, but its being necessary to the well-being of mankind. And does not the apostle manifestly urge this? He both raiseth our views to the original of government in the authority and appointment of God himself, and pointeth out to us the proper ends of government, and its great usefulness to mankind, and excellently argueth from both these. So that he is far from what this writer here thinks fit to charge him with, a *fallacious and injurious way of reasoning*.

He takes particular notice of the allegory* St. Paul makes use of, Gal. iv. 21, &c. and uses his utmost endeavours to place it in a most ridiculous light. Nothing can be more unfair and disingenuous than the account he is pleased to give of it, in which he entirely misrepresents the design and strain of the apostle's discourse. But a particular examination of what he offers, with regard to this and several other passages of Scripture, would carry me too far. It is sufficient to observe, that a careful and unprejudiced consideration of the context, and a comparing one part of Scripture with another, might easily have set him right as to the sense of most of the passages he mentions; or he might have found his difficulties cleared by able and judicious commentators, if he had been as willing to have his objections satisfied, as he was to raise them, or as a sincere inquirer after truth ought to be. Candid critics, if they meet with a passage in Homer, Plato, Aristotle, Tully, or any other celebrated profane author of antiquity, which at first view has something in it that they cannot well explain or account for, are very unwilling to charge the original author with nonsense and absurdity, and think themselves obliged to use their utmost endeavours to find out a convenient or favourable sense of the passage in question. But with this writer, and many others of the same class, it seems to be a rule to interpret every passage of Scripture in the most absurd sense that can possibly be put upon it.

Several passages were produced in my former letter, to which many others might be added, in which Mr. Chubb exclaims against

* Mr. Collins had endeavoured to expose that allegory; and the design and consistency of it was fully cleared in the answers that were made to that writer. Nor has Mr. Chubb offered any thing upon it that can be called new.

the Scripture as the source of endless contentions and divisions, as if it were to be charged with all the absurd and contradictory opinions, that have at any time been grafted upon it. This he represents, as owing to its being "expressed in a loose indeterminate way, which would be a defect in a human composition, but is scarce supposable in the case of divine revelation."* But it is no argument, that a thing is loosely and indeterminately expressed, because men differ or contend about the sense of it. This is owing to other causes. Supposing a divine revelation given to mankind, ever so clear and determinate, it could scarcely be avoided, without a constant miraculous interposition, irresistibly impressing and overruling the minds of all men, but that there would be a difference of sentiments and opinions among mankind, about many things in it; and yet this would not hinder but that such a revelation would be of signal use for instructing men in things of great importance. The fallacy of such a way of arguing, as if men's differing about any thing were a proof of its uncertainty, has been often exposed, as what would banish all religion, truth, reason, and evidence, out of the world; yet this is a common-place with the deistical writers, to which they have recourse on all occasions. Many made use of it before our author; and since the publishing of his works, a late right honourable writer hath been pleased to renew the charge. I shall not here repeat what I have elsewhere offered in answer to his Lordship, and which will equally serve to obviate all that Mr. Chubb hath advanced on this head.†

The same observation may be made with regard to his attempts against the sacred canon. He pretends, as others have done before him, that there is no proof that the books of the New Testament were written in the first age of the Christian church; that there were many spurious gospels in the primitive times, and that the Christians had no way of distinguishing the genuine from the false. These, and other things to the same purpose, he very frequently repeats in several parts of his "Farewell to his Readers," as if he thought the frequent repetition of them would persuade his readers of their truth. But I shall not need to take any particular notice of them here, but refer to what was said on this subject in the fourth letter, where some account is given of the answers that were made to Toland's *Amyntor*; to which may be added, what hath been lately offered in answer to the same objections, when urged by the noble writer last-mentioned.‡

Mr. Chubb hath also raised a great clamour about the corruption of Scripture. He layeth it down as a principle, that if God gave a revelation for the use of mankind, he would take care that it should be transmitted safe and uncorrupted to all succeeding generations; and would, by a particular and constant application of his power and providence, have defended it from all injury, wherever it was promulged, and whatever language it was rendered into. He

* *Posthumous Works*, vol. ii. p. 246, 247.

† *Reflections on Lord Bolingbroke's Letters*, p. 125, &c. ‡ *Ibid.* p. 98, &c.

intimates, that God ought to have punished with a sudden death, as in the case of Ananias and Sapphira, every man that had committed any error, either in transcribing or translating it. And if this had been the case, the consequence would have been, that no man would have ventured to transcribe or translate it at all; and this, no doubt, is what these gentlemen would wish. But there is no necessity for having recourse to such extraordinary methods; we have sufficient evidence to satisfy any reasonable person, that this revelation is transmitted to us, without any such corruptions or alterations as can destroy the usefulness of that revelation, or defeat the important ends for which it was originally given. This hath been often clearly shown. Our author indeed pronounces with great confidence, that "it is a thing abundantly evident, that the Christian revelation hath been greatly depraved and corrupted; that its pretended guardians have extracted the mystery of iniquity from it; and that we have received the books referred to from that grand fountain of corruption the church of Rome, who must have been naturally, and almost unavoidably led to corrupt them in those times of ignorance, to justify herself in all other corruptions and abuses." This he frequently repeats, as his manner is, in several parts of his book, and it hath been often urged by the deistical writers;* and it must be acknowledged, that if a general corruption of the Scriptures could have been possibly effected, none had so good an opportunity, or a stronger temptation to attempt it, than the church of Rome; and yet it is evident in fact, that they have not corrupted the Scriptures in those instances in which it was most their interest, and we might imagine also most in their inclination, to have corrupted them. There might be some pretence for such a charge, if there had been any express and formal passages inserted in the New Testament, in favour of the papal supremacy, of St. Peter's having been Bishop of Rome, the worship of images, the invocation of saints and angels, purgatory, the communion in one kind, against priests' marriage, and in favour of the monastic vows, &c.; but our author hath not attempted to produce any passages of this kind; and he himself has observed, that "the New Testament was not sufficient to support the weight of the constitution of the church of Rome, and therefore its builders prudently annexed tradition to it."† He also finds fault with their locking up the Bible from the laity, as what hath put them so far under the power of the clergy, as to involve them in gross ignorance, superstition, and slavery. Thus, this very consistent writer, with a view to expose the New Testament, would persuade us, that popery is taught and founded there, and yet would have the Bible kept in the hands of the people as a proper preservative against it.

The arguments in favour of the Jewish and Christian revelation from prophecy and miracles have always been looked upon as of great weight; and Mr. Chubb hath taken great pains to invalidate both these. With regard to prophecy, which is the entire subject of the seventh section of his "Farewell to his Readers,"‡ he pre-

* Posthumous Works, vol. ii. p. 65, 66, 118, 121, 122.

† Ibid. p. 58.

‡ Ibid. vol. ii. p. 130—174.

tends not to deny, that there may be true prophecy; that God may certainly foreknow future events, and may enable persons to foretell them; but he denies, that the prediction of future events can be admitted as an evidence of divine revelation, because a prophecy can never be known to be a true prophecy till it be fulfilled; and therefore can never be a proof or evidence at the time of its delivery, because it must appear as yet uncertain. His argument here proceeds upon a wrong supposition, as if the advocates for revelation maintained, that the mere prediction of a future event, even before the completion of it, were alone a sufficient proof to those who heard the prediction, of the divine mission of the persons who delivered it. This was far from being the only proof that was given either of the Mosaic or Christian revelation. They were both of them at their first promulgation attested and established by an amazing succession of the most wonderful works, and which plainly argued an extraordinary divine interposition; besides which, both Moses and the prophets under the Old Testament, and our Lord Jesus Christ and his apostles under the New, were enabled to give many express predictions of future events; some of which related to things which were to happen in their own time, and received a speedy accomplishment; others related to events that were not to happen till some ages after the prediction, and these also received their accomplishment in the proper season. And this, added to the other evidences, exhibited a farther illustrious proof of a divine interposition in favour of the Jewish and Christian revelation, and shows, that the first publishers of it were extraordinarily inspired by God, who, by the author's own acknowledgment, can alone foresee and foretell future contingent events. It was wisely ordered, that miracles and prophecy should go together; whereby not only the most striking evidence was given to the truth and divinity of the revelation, at the time when it was first promulgated, but provision was made that there should be a growing evidence, which might acquire new force and strength, by the successive accomplishment of the prophecies in the several different periods to which they refer. Indeed, if it were only a single prediction or two, the fulfilling of them might be looked upon to be accidental, and to amount to no more than a lucky conjecture; but a series of prophecies, such as is set before us in the sacred writings, many of them relating to things of a most contingent nature, removed at the distance of several ages, and which depended upon things that no human sagacity could foresee, must be ascribed to an extraordinary divine assistance; and it cannot reasonably be supposed, that God would impart his prescience to give credit to impostors, who falsely pretended to be inspired by him to deliver doctrines and laws to mankind.

As to that part of the evidence of Christ's divine mission, which resulteth from the prophecies of the Old Testament, this had been fully considered in the controversy between Mr. Collins and his adversaries, of which some account was given in the sixth letter. What Mr. Chubb has offered on this head is very inconsiderable; but he has one reflection that may deserve some notice; it is this:

That, "supposing those prophecies to have been fulfilled in Jesus Christ, they are not so much to be regarded as an evidence of the divine authority of the Christian revelation, as of the divine character of its primary promulger, who, being a free being, must have been at liberty whether he would have faithfully delivered those truths to the world, that had been delivered to him by his principal. And this," saith he, "must of necessity be the case of all divine revelation."* But, supposing there was a series of prophecy, relating to a wonderful person, who was to appear, at a time prefixed, as a divine teacher and Lord, and who was to erect a dispensation of truth and righteousness, and that his coming, person, offices, miracles, sufferings, and the glories that should follow, were described and pointed out by many remarkable predictions, delivered at sundry times and in divers manners, all which were fulfilled in Jesus Christ, and in him only; this certainly must be looked upon as an illustrious attestation, not only to the divinity of his mission, but to the truth of the revelation he brought in the name of God; for it were most absurd to suppose, that God would have inspired so many persons, in different ages, to foretell his coming and character as a divine teacher of truth and righteousness, if he had not perfectly foreknown that he would certainly fulfil that character, and fulfil the great trust reposed in him. And the preparing mankind for his coming by such a succession of prophecies, and pointing him out by the most glorious and peculiar characters, so many ages before his actual appearing, tended to give him an attestation of a peculiar kind, and which was never equalled in any other case.

With regard to the prophecies of Daniel, this author thinks it is impossible "that God should deliver a prophecy so darkly, as that one man only, and he a prodigy, amidst the millions of men that have taken place since that prophecy was delivered, should be able to discover the true sense and meaning of it;"† where he goes upon a supposition which is manifestly false, viz. that no man before Sir Isaac Newton was ever able to discover the meaning and intent of Daniel's prophecies. Many there have been who have laboured happily this way, both formerly and of late; and though there are several things in those prophecies that are attended with great difficulty, there are others of the predictions contained in that book, which are so clear, that the application of them is comparatively easy. And they have been wonderfully verified, in a manner which shews they could only have proceeded from that all-seeing mind which presides over contingencies, and clearly sees through the succession of ages. And the predictions there given relating to the Messiah, the design and end of his coming, and the desolation of the Jewish city and temple that should be connected with it, are of such a nature, as to give a most remarkable attestation to our Lord Jesus Christ, as the true promised Messiah. And it may be observed by the way, that this shews the vanity and falsehood of another of our author's suppositions, who pretends, that the Jewish

* Posthumous Works, p. 152, 153.

† Ibid. p. 147, 148.

expectation of the Messiah was solely owing to the notion they had of their being God's peculiar people, from whence it was natural for them to believe, that God would raise them up a glorious deliverer, who should exalt their nation to the highest degree of prosperity and grandeur; and that the prophets humoured them in this their notion and expectation: For if this had been the case, the prophets would not have spoken of a suffering Messiah; nor would they have foretold, as they have done, his being rejected by the Jews, and the judgments which should be then executed upon that nation, and that the Gentiles should be partakers of the benefits of his kingdom.

This writer, who seems to value himself upon thinking out of the common way, can see nothing extraordinary in the predictions relating to the calamities and dispersions of the Jews, and their wonderful preservation, under all their dispersions and calamities, for a long succession of ages; and yet certain it is, that their being so generally dispersed among all nations over the whole earth, and being still preserved as a distinct people, notwithstanding the unexampled discouragements, reproaches, and sufferings, to which they have been exposed, is one of the most wonderful things, taken in all its circumstances, that is to be found in the whole history of mankind; and as it hath no parallel, its being so plainly foretold above three thousand years ago (for so long it is since the time of Moses, who first prophesied of it) is a most signal instance of a true prophetic spirit; and could only be owing to the inspiration of that omniscient Being, who "declareth the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things which are not yet done."

I shall only take notice of one observation more, which our author hath made with regard to the proof from prophecy, viz. that it appears from St. Paul's account, that the gift of prophecy was a distinct gift from that of knowledge, 1 Cor. xii. 8, 9, 10, and "that they had no connection or dependence upon one another;" and he thinks therefore, "that a person's foretelling things to come, does not prove a superiority of knowledge, and that the prophet's knowledge extends farther than the prophecies he delivers." But if we examine that passage of St. Paul which he refers to, we shall find it is far from answering the end he proposes by it, viz. to invalidate the proof from prophecy in favour of the Christian revelation. The apostle is there speaking of the several gifts of the Holy Ghost, which were poured forth on many of the Christian converts in that first age, in various proportions and degrees according to his will. One of these was, that of prophecy. It is not certain, that by *prophecy*, in that particular passage, is to be understood the foretelling things to come; for the word prophecy is sometimes taken in that epistle in another sense; but allowing it to be so, since it appears from other passages that such a gift there was in the first age of the Christian church (and it was what our Saviour had promised, John xvi. 13), in that case it must be said, that such a gift, if really conferred, could only proceed from God, or his Holy Spirit; and as those extraordinary gifts, of which this was one, were communi-

cated by the laying on of the hands of the apostles in the name of a crucified and risen Jesus, the conferring these gifts on any of the Christian converts may be justly regarded as a most illustrious proof of a divine interposition in favour of Christianity, and of the divine mission of the apostles, the first authorized publishers of it.

Having considered the principal things this writer has urged on the head of prophecy, I shall take some notice of what he hath offered concerning the proof from miracles; this is the subject of his eighth section.* He will not allow, that miracles can be any proof of the divine mission of persons or truth of doctrines. What he chiefly insisteth upon to this purpose is, that the power of working miracles may be equally annexed to falsehood and truth; and whereas it might be objected, that God will not suffer miraculous power to be misapplied, because, were that the case, mankind would be greatly exposed to imposition, he answers, "that when a miracle is once wrought, it must and will be in the option of the operator to apply that power as he pleases, either well or ill, nor could God prevent it, otherwise than by destroying his being or his agency." But supposing, which is the present supposition, a real power of working miracles communicated from God, with a view to give attestation to the divine mission of persons sent to instruct the world in important truths, it is absurd to suppose, that he would continue that power to them, if they applied it to the confirming of falsehood; or that he would have given them that power for attesting truth, if he foresaw they would use it in favour of falsehood: and in that case he must have foreseen it. With regard to the power of working miracles in the first age of the Christian church, it was not at the option of the persons who had that power to use it when or to what purpose they pleased. They could only work those miracles, when and upon what occasion it seemed fit to the Holy Ghost that they should do them; in which case they had an extraordinary impulse, which is usually called *the faith of miracles*, which was a kind of direction to them, when to work those miracles, and whereby they knew and were persuaded that God would enable them to do them. The proper use and design of those miracles was, to confirm the testimony given by the apostles to our Saviour and his resurrection, and the truth of the doctrines they taught as received from him; nor can any one proof be brought, though he takes it for granted, that any false teachers in that age did, by virtue of any extraordinary gift or powers of the Holy Ghost communicated to them, work miracles to confirm the false doctrines they preached. On the contrary, St. Paul appeals to the Galatians themselves, as in a matter of fact which could not be contested, that miracles were only wrought, and the extraordinary gifts of the Spirit communicated, in attestation to that true doctrine of the gospel which he had preached, and not to that *other gospel*, as he calleth it, which the false teachers would have imposed upon them.

* Posthumous Works, vol. ii. p. 177—249.

Gal. iii. 2, 5. But I have elsewhere considered this matter at large, and shall not here repeat what was there offered.*

But what our author chiefly bends himself to prove is, that the accounts given us of the miracles recorded in the New Testament are false or uncertain, and not at all to be depended on. To this purpose he mentions several of our Saviour's miracles, and repeats the same objections against them that had been urged by Mr. Woolston before, and to which solid answers had been returned. Every thing in the evangelical accounts that appears to him strange or extraordinary, he rejects at once. I cannot here enter into a distinct consideration of the several particulars he allegeth. I shall only mention one, on which he seems to lay a greater stress than any of the rest, and which he insists upon more than once, as alone sufficient to destroy the credit of the evangelical historians. It relates to the account given of our Saviour's temptations in the wilderness. It will be readily owned, that the fact referred to is of a very extraordinary nature. But a thing may be very strange and wonderful, and yet very true, and is to be received as such, if it comes to us vouched by a sufficient authority; and in this case the authority is sufficient; for I think it cannot reasonably be doubted, that the account came originally from our Lord himself, since no other could be supposed to know it, and that it was well known to the apostles and disciples to have come from him. It is distinctly related by two of the evangelists, St. Matthew and St. Luke, and referred to by a third, St. Mark. St. John, according to the method he pursues, of insisting chiefly upon things not mentioned by the rest, had no occasion to take notice of it. There is not the least reason to suppose, that the evangelists would have inserted such an account as this, if they had not been assured that the information came from Christ himself; and his authority is a sufficient warrant for believing it; nor is our author able to prove, that there is any thing here ascribed to Satan, which he might not be able, or might not be permitted to perform. In what manner he pretended to show to our Saviour, "all the kingdoms of the world, and all the glory of them," we are not told; nor is there any necessity here of taking the word *all* in the strictest sense. But in what way soever this was done, concerning which we cannot pretend certainly to judge, this writer doth not know enough of the case to pronounce it impossible. Supposing there are evil spirits, can any man take upon him positively to determine how far their power and ability may extend? And that there are both good and evil spirits superior to man, hath been the general belief of mankind in all nations and ages, and even of the best and wisest of men; nor can a shadow of reason be brought to prove the existence of such spirits to be either impossible or improbable, though our author, in his great wisdom, has all along rejected all accounts where there is any mention made of angels or devils, with as much confidence, as if he could clearly demonstrate that there cannot possibly be any such thing.

* Divine Authority of the Old and New Test. asserted, vol. i. p. 380—387.

He frequently speaks of the weakness and credulity of the sacred historians, and represents the accounts given in the gospels, and in the Acts of the Apostles, as mere fictions, *more like Jewish fables, or popish legends, than real facts.** He expressly declares, "that some of the popish miracles, though generally rejected by Protestants as fraud and imposture, are better attested than any of the miracles which were wrought, or supposed to be wrought, in the first century; and that had the like strict scrutiny been made in former times that is at present, those ancient miracles would have been rejected."† But every thinking person will easily see a mighty difference in the case between miracles wrought before persons highly prejudiced in their favour, and in proof of the reigning religion, where power and interest is on their side, and where there is not a full liberty allowed to make a strict inquiry in the view of enemies themselves, and where the public prejudices lie on the other side, and power, interest, and authority are engaged against them. There will always be ground of suspicion in the former case, not equally so in the latter. The miracles said to be wrought by the Romish church, are done in countries where Popery is the established religion, and have power, and the prejudices of the people, and an evident worldly interest, on their side; and they are not performed openly in the view of Protestants and for their conviction, in places where there is a full liberty of examining into all the circumstances relating to them; whereas the miracles whereby Christianity was established, were done openly, and in the view of enemies, able and willing to have detected the imposture, if there had been any; they were done to establish a scheme of religion, the most opposite that could be imagined to the prevailing prejudices both of Jews and Gentiles, and even to the prejudices that had possessed the minds of the very persons by whom these miracles were wrought; and when all the power and authority of the world, as well as the influence and artifices of the priesthood, and every worldly advantage, lay wholly on the other side; and yet vast numbers were brought over to receive a crucified Jesus as their Saviour and their Lord, in that very age, by the evidence of those miracles and extraordinary facts, concerning which they had the best opportunity of being informed, in opposition to all their worldly interests, and their most inveterate prejudices. In vain then it is to inveigh, as this writer does, against the historians, and to pretend, that "they were weak enough to give credit to any relations they might pick up, and had courage enough to put upon the world whatever might be put upon them;"‡ for the things related by them are of such a public nature, that if they had been false, it would have been the easiest thing in the world for their enemies, of whom there were many, to have detected them; which would have crushed this religion in its infancy. Our author himself is sensible how difficult it would have been to impose facts of so extraordinary and so public a nature, as those recorded in the gospels, and in the Acts of the Apostles, in the very age in which the

* *Ubi supra*, p. 192, 193.† *Ibid.* p. 226, 227.‡ *Posthumous Works*, p. 194.

facts were said to be done ; and therefore, without so much as attempting to offer the least proof, takes upon him to affirm, that the accounts of these facts were not published till a long time after, when there was nobody alive that could contradict them ; and he declares as positively as if he could prove it to be so, that they were not made public till the second century, which he represents as an age of fiction and forgery. This is what he particularly affirms concerning the accounts given in the Acts of the Apostles ; though it is evident from the book itself, that it was written in the apostolical age, and before the second imprisonment or the death of St. Paul. In the second century, Christianity had already made a wonderful progress through the nations, of which there are unquestionable proofs ; and by a strange absurdity he supposes, that the extraordinary facts whereby the Christian religion was attested and confirmed, were not published till that time, *i. e.* that they were not heard of or made public, till long after the founding of the Christian church, though it was wholly upon the credit of those facts that the Christian church was founded. He pretends farther, that the accounts of these things “ were kept as a treasure in the hands of believers, not known to unbelievers, who therefore had it not in their power to confute them, or detect the fraud ;” * and yet certain it is, that the apostles went every where preaching the religion of Jesus to an unbelieving world. All those to whom the first publishers of Christianity preached the gospel, and published the accounts of the important facts on which it was founded, were at first unbelievers ; and it was upon the convincing assurance they had of the truth of these facts, that they were brought over to embrace it, and of unbelieving Jews or heathens became Christians, or believers in Jesus Christ. And whereas he adds, that “ those facts were not published at or near the place of the performance, but in Greece, Italy, &c., where the people could not contradict them ;” he seems not to have considered, that all these things were first published in Judea, where the first Christian churches were founded ; and that great numbers of Jews were converted in the places where all the facts were done. It was not till after they had been published some years in Judea, that they were made known to the Gentiles. And in all those countries where the gospel was preached, there were vast numbers of Jews, who had a continual correspondence with those in Judea, and went frequently to Jerusalem to the public feasts, and could therefore easily procure information whether those facts were as they had been represented.

I shall not need to make any observations upon what Mr. Chubb hath offered against the accounts given by the evangelists of our Lord’s resurrection ; for, as he has only enlarged on some of the same objections which had been advanced by the author of “ The Resurrection of Jesus considered,” it may be sufficient to refer to what has been said on this subject in the twelfth letter.

Having considered the attempts made by Mr. Chubb to invalidate

* Posthumous Works, vol ii. p. 203—205.

the argument in behalf of divine revelation from prophecy and miracles, it will not be improper to take some notice of what hath been offered to take off the force of the argument, which he hath frequently urged, from the wonderful propagation of Christianity, in behalf of its divine original. He acknowledgeth, that "it is improbable that Christianity should take place, and prevail in the world, and to the degree it did, or at least that we are told it did, supposing the history of Christ's life and ministry to be a fiction ;"* but then, as if he had granted too much, he observes, that "the present run of Methodism, without any miraculous power attending it, or any external evidence to back it, takes off from the weight and force of the argument."† He often returns to this, and in several parts of his book seems willing to run a parallel between the progress of Christianity and that of Methodism. But this only shows the strong prejudices of those who glory in the character of free-thinkers, and how forward they are to catch at the slightest pretences for setting aside the evidences brought in favour of Christianity ; for in reality there can be no reasonable parallel drawn between the one and the other. There is no great wonder in it, that professed Christians, pretending to a high degree of purity and piety, and to teach true scriptural Christianity, should make some progress (not in pagan and Mahometan, or even in Popish countries ; for I do not find our Methodists take upon them to make many conversions there, but) in a country where scriptural Christianity is professed, and a full toleration allowed. There is nothing in this but what may be easily accounted for, without supposing any thing supernatural in the case. They do not pretend to new extraordinary revelations, nor appeal to any miraculous facts, as the French prophets did ; in which case the failure of those facts might easily subject them to a detection ; but they build upon the religion already received among us, and only pretend to explain and enforce the doctrines there taught. But the case was entirely different with regard to the apostles and first publishers of Christianity. The religion they preached, and especially the great fundamental article of it, the receiving a crucified Jesus for their Saviour and Lord, was contrary to the most rooted prejudices both of Jews and Gentiles ; it tended entirely to subvert the whole system of the pagan superstition and idolatry, and also the pleasing hopes the Jews had entertained concerning a temporal Messiah, who should raise their nation to the height of secular dominion and grandeur ; it was holy and self-denying in its nature and tendency, and was designed not to flatter, but to subdue and mortify, the corrupt lusts and passions of men ; it appealed to facts of the most extraordinary and public nature, and which could not fail being detected, if they had been false ; the first publishers of it were not only destitute of every worldly advantage, but had the most insurmountable difficulties to encounter with ; they were exposed to the most grievous persecutions, reproaches, and sufferings, and had all the powers of the world engaged against them ; that therefore they

* Posthumous Works, vol. ii. p. 40, 41.

† Ibid. marginal note.

should be able in such circumstances to bring over vast numbers both of Jews and Gentiles to the faith of the crucified Jesus, and that the religion they taught should in spite of all opposition prevail, and at length overturn the whole established superstition, which had every worldly advantage to support it; this cannot be reasonably accounted for, without supposing the interposition of a divine power, and the truth of the extraordinary facts on which it was founded.

Mr. Chubb seems to lay a particular stress *on the great change which, he pretends, took place in Christianity, whilst in its most primitive state.* He affirms, that "the apostles set out upon two principles, which may be considered as the foundation or corner-stone of the Christian building. 1. That Christianity is a supplement to Judaism, and therefore was to be grafted upon it; and that the law of Moses was not to be abolished, but still continued. 2. That the Gospel was a favour to be vouchsafed to the Jews only, and that to them only it was to be preached." And he pretends, that "the apostles were unavoidably led into these principles by their Master himself;" but that "in a little time they quite changed the original scheme or plan of Christianity, and dug up and destroyed the foundations they themselves had laid:" and then he asks, "How do we know in what instances they may be depended upon? and if they acted wrong in this, how does it appear that they ever acted right?"* This he returns to on several occasions. But this whole matter is entirely misrepresented: it is plain from several hints given by our Lord himself during his personal ministry, that it was really his intention, and the design upon which he was sent, to erect a new and more perfect dispensation than the Mosaical was, though it was not as yet a proper season to make a public declaration of it; that his gospel was to be preached not to the Jews only, but also to the Gentiles; and that the latter were to be taken into his church, and to be made partakers of his benefits, and of the great salvation he came to procure. Any one will be convinced of this, who impartially considers the following passages, Matth. viii. 10, 11, 12. xv. 10, 11. xxi. 43. John iv. 21, 23. x. 16. The utmost that our author's pretence can be made to amount to, is really no more than this: that the apostles, for some time after our Lord's ascension, were not entirely freed from their Jewish prejudices. And supposing, which was really the case, that the Jewish dispensation was originally from God, and was designed to give way to the more perfect dispensation of the gospel, for which it was preparatory, there was a great propriety in it that the change should not be brought about all at once, which might have been too great a shock even to honest and well-disposed minds. The gradual method of unfolding the Christian scheme, and dispelling the apostles' prejudices, instead of being a just objection, shows that the whole was conducted with a divine wisdom and goodness: and their having continued for some time under these prejudices, giveth a mighty force to their testimony,

* Posthumous Works, vol. ii. p. 84, & seq.

and furnisheth a manifest proof that the Christian dispensation was not of their own invention, nor was owing to a sudden pang of enthusiasm; since it was with such difficulty that they themselves were brought to discern and embrace it, considered in its proper harmony. And it was only owing to the strength of the overpowering light and evidence, that all their prejudices were at length overcome and dispelled.

Besides the two principles mentioned above, Mr. Chubb has thought fit to take notice of a third, which he also pretends was a fundamental principle of Christianity, as laid down by the apostles, viz. "That the disciples of Christ were to have one common stock or property, of which the clergy were constituted the trustees and directors:" and he thinks, that "from this it appears, how groundless that pretence must be, that the apostles and ministers of Jesus Christ could have no worldly advantage in view, when they went forth to preach the gospel; whereas nothing can be more evident, than that they had a fair prospect of, and a very plausible pretence for, gathering great riches into their hands, as keepers and managers of the church's property or treasure." This he is so fond of, that he insisteth upon it for several pages together.* And the author of the *Resurrection of Jesus considered* had hinted at the same thing before him, to show, that the apostles were interested witnesses, and that therefore their testimony to Christ's resurrection is not to be depended on.† But all this is built on a false foundation; for there was no divine or apostolical constitution obliging Christians to put their whole worldly substance into the common stock, and to commit it to the apostles as the directors. It appeareth plainly from St. Peter's words to Ananias, that it was a matter which depended entirely on the free choice of the Christian converts, and was the effect of their voluntary zeal and charity; and it was an illustrious proof of the strong conviction and persuasion they had of the truth of the gospel, and of those great and extraordinary facts by which Christianity was supported. This was the more remarkable, as it was at Jerusalem that this was done, soon after our Lord's resurrection and ascension, and the extraordinary effusion of the Holy Ghost on the day of Pentecost, and where they had the best opportunity of knowing the evidences of those facts. But whatever was done this way, in the extraordinary circumstances in which the first Christians were placed, it is manifest from some passages in the New Testament, and particularly from St. Paul's directions to the Corinthians, that this was not designed to be generally obligatory upon all Christians. See 1 Cor. xvi. 1, 2. 2 Cor. viii. 9. And indeed it seems to have been peculiar to those at Jerusalem; for which undoubtedly there were particular reasons; and even there, so far were the apostles from claiming to themselves the direction of the public stock, that they expressly refused to have any thing to do with the management of it, that they might apply themselves to their proper work, the ministry of the word; and it was given into the

* Posthumous Works, p. 102—110.

† Resurrection of Jesus considered, p. 68.

hands of persons of unexceptionable characters, chosen by the Christian society for that purpose, that they might impartially distribute out of the common stock to those that needed it, Acts vi. 1, 2, 3. If the apostles had been actuated by worldly views, they would certainly have chosen a scheme of religion, more cunningly accommodated to the prevailing humours and prejudices of mankind; for what prospect could they have of persuading people to give up their treasures and worldly substance into their hands, by preaching up to the Jews a person that had been condemned and crucified by the chief priests and rulers of their own nation for their Messiah, and preaching up to the Gentiles a crucified Jew for their Lord and Saviour? Our author himself is sensible of this, and therefore at the same time that he talks of the fair worldly prospect they had, he owns that these prospects must have depended upon their expecting success in their ministry, and upon their being persuaded that they had God and his promises on their side, and that Christ would be with them, as he had foretold, to the *end of the world*:* so that, according to his own way of stating the case, and indeed according to the reason of the thing, their prospect of success was founded in the firm belief they had of the truth and divinity of Christ's mission, and of his resurrection and exaltation to glory. So inconsistent is this writer's hypothesis, that, in order to make good his charge of worldly interested views against the apostles, he is forced to go upon a supposition of the truth of the illustrious attestations that were given to the Christian religion, and which he elsewhere endeavours to invalidate. And yet, supposing the apostles to have believed what their Lord had told them, they could have no worldly advantage to expect; since he had assured them, that they should be exposed to all manner of reproaches, persecutions, and sufferings, both from Jews and Gentiles, and should be *hated of all men for his name's sake*. And this was actually the case: what the apostles got by preaching up the religion of Jesus is in a very affecting manner represented by St. Paul, who was one of them: from whence it is manifest, that never were there any persons exposed to a greater variety of hardships and sufferings, 1 Cor. iv. 9, 11, 12, 13. xv. 19, 32. 2 Cor. iv. 8, 9, 10, 11. xi. 23—28.

It is particularly evident, that this last mentioned great apostle could have no worldly advantage in view in embracing Christianity. His interests, reputation, and prejudices, lay wholly the other way, and tended strongly to bias him against it. Nothing but conviction, and the power of evidence, could overcome his obstinacy; after which he became the most eminently instrumental to propagate the Christian religion in the world, of which he had been a most zealous persecutor before. And this seems to be the cause of that peculiar rancour and prejudice, which this writer every-where discovers against him. The best judges have admired the strength and closeness of St. Paul's reasoning; this particularly was the judgment of one of the best reasoners of the age, Mr. Locke, who studied his

* Posthumous Works, vol. ii. p. 108, 109.

writings with great application. But our author has thought fit to represent him as a *loose unguarded writer*, who did *not attend to his own argument, or to the subject*. He frequently charges him with drawing wrong conclusions from his premises; and that his epistles were crude, indigested performances, which were *probably sent as they were first wrote, without being revised by him*; and that this sometimes involved him in confusion. He endeavours to give the most absurd and ridiculous turn possible to several passages in his writings; some instances of which were taken notice of above, to which many others might be added. Not content with this, he represents this excellent person, who was no less remarkable for his humility than for his many other virtues, as a vain-glorious boaster, and treats the account which, with a remarkable modesty, and as it were by constraint, he gives of his labours and sufferings, as *a bravado, and past all belief*. * He accuses him and St. James as guilty of the *most gross and notorious dissimulation and hypocrisy*, and represents him as the great author of *pious frauds* in religion: and that he acted upon this principle, "that truth in some cases may and ought to be dispensed with;" and that therefore he and the other apostles were capable of giving a *false testimony to serve the Christian cause*.† But this certainly was not St. Paul's principle; he has condemned in the strongest terms those who maintained, that it is lawful to lie for the glory of God, and *to do evil that good may come of it*; which is the great principle upon which pious frauds are built, Rom. iii. 5, 6. All that Mr. Chubb has advanced, to prove the heavy charge he has brought against this great apostle, is reducible to two facts. The one is, his saying before the council, that *of the hope and resurrection of the dead he was called in question*, Acts xxiii. 6.; upon which our author observes, that in this "he acted a deceitful part, and coined a lie to save himself, since he was not called in question about the resurrection, nor was this any part of the charge against him."‡ But that the preaching through Jesus Christ the resurrection of the dead, was one reason of the persecution which was raised against Christ's disciples; and that this was what particularly excited the rage of the Sadducees against them, of which party the high priest, or at least many of those about him, and who were men of power and interest, appear to have been, is plain from the account given in the Acts of the Apostles, chap. iv. 1, 2, 3. v. 17. And it was very allowable for the apostle to take advantage of this, for creating a division among his adversaries, who were not themselves agreed what charge to bring against him. This is a proof of his prudence and address, and that he did not run upon his sufferings with a blind enthusiastic heat; but it is no proof of his dishonesty. The other instance upon which the charge of hypocrisy and lying against St. Paul is founded, is taken from what he did at Jerusalem, by St. James's advice, in purifying *himself in the temple*, Acts xxi. 20—26.§ But if this had been fairly repre-

* Posthumous Works, vol. ii. p. 361, 365.

† Ibid. vol. i. p. 330, 331. vol. ii. p. 238.

‡ Ibid. p. 92, &c. 235, &c.

§ Ibid. vol. i. p. 92, 93. 98.

sented, it would have appeared, that there was nothing in his conduct on this occasion inconsistent with honesty and integrity. What the Jewish Christians had been informed of concerning St. Paul was, that he had *taught the Jews which were among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, saying, that they ought not to circumcise their children, neither to walk after the customs,* ver 21. They represented him as having taught, that it was absolutely unlawful for the Jews to circumcise their children, or to observe the Jewish rites. This accusation was false: St. Paul had not taught this; he only had argued against the necessity of observing that law, and had urged Jews and Gentiles to a mutual forbearance with one another in this matter. And what he did pursuant to the advice of St. James, showed that he did not look upon it to be then unlawful to observe the Jewish rites; and that he judged it both lawful and expedient in some cases to observe them, for avoiding scandal; and upon this principle he proceeded in circumcising Timothy. This whole matter had been set in a clear light, and the wisdom and consistency of the conduct of St. Paul and the other apostles fully justified, in the answers that were made to the *Moral Philosopher*. But Mr. Chubb repeats the charge, without troubling himself to take off the force of what had been offered for clearing it.

After what hath been observed, it will be no surprize to find, that this writer represents the being converted to Christianity as of no importance at all, and that he frequently lets us know, that he looks upon all religions to be alike, with regard to the favour of God. "The turning from Mahometanism to Christianity," says he, "or from Christianity to Mahometanism, is only a laying aside one external form of religion, and making use of another, which is of no more real benefit, than a man's changing the colour of his clothes, by putting off a red coat, and putting on a blue one in its stead."* He elsewhere represents it as an indifferent matter, "whether a man adopts Judaism, or Paganism, or Mahometanism, or Christianity;" and what is more extraordinary, he would put this upon us, as St. Peter's sentiment as well as his own; and endeavours, after his manner, to prove it from that noted passage, Acts x, 34, 35. *Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons; but in every nation, he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him.* He pretends, that St. Peter here teacheth, "that faith in any religious leader, or his ministry, is altogether super-numerary, and that he hath excluded both faith and infidelity out of the case:"† as if the apostle there designed to tell Cornelius, that it was of no manner of importance whether he believed in Jesus Christ or not; which is to make him speak in direct contradiction to the very design of his being sent to Cornelius, and of all his subsequent discourse to him. St. Peter signifieth indeed, in the words cited by this author, that whosoever in any nation, like Cornelius, truly feared and worshipped God, and practised righteousness, should be accepted of him, though not belonging to the Jewish

* *Posthumous Works*, vol. ii. p. 33, 34.

† *Ibid.* vol. i. p. 295—302.

nation, or initiated into the Mosaic polity; but he certainly never intended to signify, that the embracing Christianity was a matter of mere indifference. Cornelius's piety and good dispositions would have rendered him acceptable to God, though he had not heard of Christ; but when he had an opportunity of being informed, that very piety and fear of God led him to receive those significations of the divine will, and to believe in Jesus Christ whom he had sent. The great importance and advantage of faith in Christ, in such a case, is evidently supposed in St. Peter's whole discourse, who was extraordinarily sent on purpose to instruct him in it. This writer thinks proper to find fault with the author of the Acts of the Apostles, for laying so great a stress on the conversion of Jews or heathens to Christianity, which, in his opinion, is "of little consequence as to the favour of God, or their future safety, because, if they were virtuous and good men, they were secure without such conversion, and if they were bad vicious men, they were not secured by it."* But if they were good men before, and were thereby put in the way of greater improvements in goodness, more fully instructed in religion, raised to more glorious hopes, and furnished with more excellent helps, and more powerful animating encouragements to all virtue and universal righteousness; or if they were bad men, involved in gross ignorance and idolatry, superstition and vice, which was the general character of the heathens when the gospel appeared, and by turning to Christianity were brought to the knowledge and pure adoration of the only true God, and engaged to forsake their evil ways, and to live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world; and no other were accounted true Christian converts; this, by the author's own acknowledgment, must have been a signal advantage. He himself had said a little before, "if the revelation referred to could furnish me with useful knowledge, or with a better rule of life, or with more powerful excitements to the practice of virtue and true religion, than at present I am in possession of, and thereby I should be made a wiser and a better man, then I acknowledge, that such conviction would be beneficial to me in proportion to such improvement."† This is evidently the case of the Christian revelation, wherever it is sincerely believed and embraced, and men give themselves up to its divine conduct; and therefore those to whom this revelation is offered, and who yet despise and reject it, are justly chargeable with great guilt; for it cannot be a slight guilt to reject the valuable means and helps which God hath, in his infinite wisdom and goodness, provided, for promoting our spiritual improvement, and engaging and enabling us to work out our own salvation: nor can any thing be more unreasonable than to pretend, as the enemies of revelation have often done, that because virtue and righteousness are what God approves, therefore faith is unnecessary, and of no consequence at all. The very contrary follows from it: for, if moral improve-

* Posthumous Works, vol. ii. p. 33. † Ibid. p. 32.

ment and true holiness be of such vast importance, then certainly the best and properest means for attaining to it are very needful, and to be highly valued; and such are the means and helps which the religion of Jesus affordeth, as laid down in the Holy Scriptures: and to reject those means and assistances, under pretence of obtaining the end without them, is a most absurd and criminal conduct, justly displeasing in the sight of God, and a most unworthy return to his infinite goodness.

I shall conclude my remarks on Mr. Chubb's *Posthumous Works*, with taking notice of a remarkable passage at the end of the eighth section of his *Farewell to his Readers*. After having done all he could to expose the Scriptures, and shew that it is not safe to appeal to them, he draws this conclusion from the whole: that "this shews the great propriety of our returning back to that prior rule of action, which is the ground and foundation of moral truth, and consequently of moral certainty; viz. that eternal and invariable rule of right and wrong, as to an infallible guide, and as the solid ground of our peace and safety, which rule we are too easily diverted from.*" He seems to speak here, as if Christians, and those that were for adhering to Scripture as their rule, had no regard to the rule of right and wrong, or to the nature and reason of things, which is a gross misrepresentation; and as if the deists were under the conduct of an infallible guide. Particularly it is to be supposed, that he would have it to be understood that he himself hath taken care to follow the infallible guide he recommends: but if we are to judge by the effect it has had upon himself, we have no great encouragement to entertain a very favourable opinion of the advantage we shall obtain by forsaking the Scripture, under pretence of following such a guide. For what is it, that his infallible guide has directed him to? It has inclined him to deny a particular providence, or that God now interposeth in ordering or governing the affairs of men, and the events relating to them, whether with regard to nations or particular persons, and consequently has directed him not to make a dependence on providence, a trust in God, or resignation to his will, any part of his religion: it hath taught him not to expect any gracious assistances from God, or to apply to him for them: it leaveth him at a loss whether it be proper to pray to God at all, and inclineth him to think that it is the safest way to let it alone: nor doth this guide inform him, whether men's souls are material or immaterial, or whether they shall subsist after death, or shall die and perish with the body, or whether there shall be a future state in which God will call men to an account for their actions: or, if there shall be a future judgment, his guide leadeth him to apprehend that it shall extend but to a small part of the human race, and but to a few of the actions they perform; that they shall not be called to an account for the blasphemies they may have uttered against God, or for any neglect of duties that more immediately relate to the Deity, or for private injuries they do to one another, or for any

* *Posthumous Works*, vol. ii. p. 249.

actions at all but those which concern the public; and how far these are to extend, he hath not thought fit to inform us. I cannot see therefore but that it is much better to follow the light the Scripture affordeth us, which giveth us clear instructions in these and other things of great importance, concerning which our author's infallible guide, according to his account of the matter, hath given him no directions at all, or hath given him wrong ones.

I have now finished my observations on Mr. Chubb's *Posthumous Works*, which I have perhaps enlarged upon more than they really deserve. But I have chosen to do it, both because they seem to be of a dangerous tendency, and well fitted to do mischief, and have by some persons been very much extolled, and because there has been no answer, that I know of, given to those books. I do not love to make reflections that seem to bear hard upon any man's integrity: but I think it cannot be denied, that, notwithstanding his great pretences to plainness and candour, and an impartial love of truth and liberty, there are very apparent marks of great disingenuity in his writings. The nature of this work would not admit of my entering into a more minute examination; but there are few things of consequence in his two volumes which are not here taken notice of.

LETTER XV.

Observations upon a Pamphlet, intituled, *Deism fairly Stated, and fully Vindicated*.—The Author's pompous Account of Deism, and his way of stating the Question between Christians and Deists, considered.—Concerning the differences among Christians about the Way of knowing the Scriptures to be the Word of God.—The Charge he brings against the Christian Religion, as consisting only of unintelligible Doctrines and useless Institutions, and his Pretence, that the Moral Precepts do not belong to Christianity at all, but are the Property of Deists, shewn to be vain and groundless.—The Corruptions of Christians no just Argument against true Christianity.—A brief Account of Lord Bolingbroke's Attempt against the Scriptures in his *Letters on the Study and Use of History*.

SIR,

HAVING considered pretty largely Mr. Chubb's *Posthumous Works*, I shall now send you some observations upon a pamphlet, which, though originally written by another hand, is said to have been revised by Mr. Chubb, and to have undergone considerable alterations and amendments: it is intituled *Deism fairly Stated, and fully Vindicated*, and was published in 1746. And as it hath been much boasted of, I shall distinctly consider both the account the author of it gives of deism, and the attempt he hath made to expose the Christian revelation.

In his account of deism he treads in the steps of Dr. Tindal, and

it might be sufficient to refer to the remarks that have been made upon that writer's scheme, of which some account was given in the tenth Letter. But let us examine our author's pretensions more distinctly.

He tells us that "deism is no other than the religion essential to man, the true original religion of nature and reason.*" And because Christian divines have asserted, that the gospel contains the true religion of reason and nature, he represents them, and particularly the present bishop of London, and Mr. (now Dr.) Samuel Chandler, as acknowledging, that "deism is the alone excellence and true glory "of Christianity," and pretends that what he has cited from them proves, that "deism is all in the Christian institution that can possibly approve itself to the true genuine reason of man.†" And accordingly he declares, that "every thing that is enjoined in the "gospel to be believed as a rational doctrine, or practised as a "natural duty, relating to God, our neighbours, and ourselves, is an "established part of deism.‡" And through his whole book he supposes deism to comprehend every doctrine and precept which is founded in reason and nature, or, as he sometimes expresseth it, in *truth* and *reason*, *i. e.* it comprehendeth every doctrine and precept that is true and just and reasonable.

That we may judge of the fairness of this writer in stating the point, it is proper to observe, that the thing he would be thought to vindicate is the religion of those that call themselves deists, and who reject revelation, and oppose Christianity. This is the only deism in question, and which it concerneth him to state and vindicate. But he has thought fit all along to represent deism and natural religion as terms of the same signification; whereas deism, as we are now considering it, is to be understood, not precisely of natural religion, as comprehending those truths which have a real foundation in reason and nature, and which is so far from being opposite to Christianity, that it is one great design of the gospel to clear and enforce it; but of that religion which every man is to find out for himself by the mere force of natural reason, independent of all revelation, and exclusive of it. It is concerning this that the inquiry properly proceeds. Dr. Tindal was sensible of it; and therefore is for sending every man to the oracle in his own breast as the only guide to duty and happiness, which alone he is to consult, without having any regard to revelation: and accordingly he frequently represents the religion of nature as so clearly known to all men, even to *those that cannot read in their mother tongue*, as to render any farther revelation perfectly needless and useless. But if the question be concerning natural religion in this sense, it is far from deserving all the fine encomiums which this writer, after Dr. Tindal, so liberally bestows upon: he represents it as so perfect, that nothing can be added to it: and therefore will not allow, that Christianity can be said to be "grounded on natural religion, or to be an

* Deism fairly Stated, &c. p. 5.

† Ibid. p. 6.

‡ Ibid. p. 7.

"improvement of it:" for he declares, that he "cannot possibly conceive how an entire and perfect structure (which is the case of "natural religion) can be only a foundation of a perfect structure, "or how a perfect religion can be improved.*" Here he securely assumes the very thing in question, viz. that the religion which every man knoweth of himself by his own unassisted reason is so perfect, as to be incapable of receiving any addition or improvement, even from divine revelation: which is in other words to say, that every man by his own reason, exclusively of all revelation, takes in the whole of religious truth and duty, which is founded in the nature of things, and knows as much of it already as God can teach him: and that a divine revelation can give him no farther light or stronger assurance, relating to any thing that it is proper for him to believe or practise in religion, than what his bare reason informs him of without it.

Among the encomiums which our author bestows upon deism, one is, that it is "no other than the religion essential to man;†" a phrase that he and others of the deistical writers seem fond of. But will these sagacious gentlemen undertake to inform the world what kind or degree of religion is essential to the human nature? Or, if they could oblige the world with that discovery, is nothing valuable in religion but what is essential to man? If revelation discovereth to us some things of importance which we could not attain to the knowledge of by bare unassisted reason; or giveth us farther assurances concerning some things, as to which we were doubtful before, and setteth them in a clearer light; or exhibiteth a more complete system of duty; or furnisheth more powerful motives to animate us to the practice of it; must all these discoveries be rejected, under pretence that what we thus receive by revelation is not essential to man? Might not all improvements of every kind be discarded for the same reason? And so man must be left in his pure essentials. And then what a fine figure would the human nature make!

Besides this general account of deism, our author takes upon him to exhibit some fundamental *credenda* of a deist; and he might easily find a plausible scheme of natural religion formed ready to his hand by Christian writers, and then put it upon the world for pure genuine deism. Among these fundamental articles of the religion of a deist, he reckons the belief of a future state of rewards and punishments. But is this a point in which the deists are agreed? Lord Bolingbroke every-where sets up for a deist of the first rank, and glories in that character, and yet he does all he can to weaken or subvert that which is here put upon us as a fundamental article of the deistical creed: and Mr. Chubb, who no doubt would pass with our author for a true deist, though sometimes, like this writer, he makes a great shew of believing not only the truth but the importance of that doctrine; yet in several passages of his *Farewell to his Readers*, and especially in his fourth and fifth sections, where he

* *Deism fairly Stated*, &c. p. 13.

† *Ibid.* p. 513.

treats professedly of this subject, setteth himself to shew that it is altogether uncertain, and incapable of being proved, and that the probability lies against it.* Thus it is that these gentlemen are sometimes willing to make a fair appearance with their principles, till persons are drawn in, and fully initiated in the mysteries of deism.

This author gives us twelve propositions with great pomp, most of which have nothing to do with the debate between Christians and deists, and others of them are very ambiguous. † In his seventh proposition he layeth it down as a principle, that “to govern our conduct by our reason is our duty, and all that God requireth of us.” If the meaning be, that God requireth nothing from us but what we know by our bare unassisted reason to be our duty, and that if any thing farther be revealed to be our duty, we are not obliged to perform it, because we did not know it to be so by our own natural reason independently of that revelation, it is false and absurd: for when God requireth us to be governed by our reason, it must be supposed to be his intention, that we should take in all proper helps and assistances. And if he is pleased in his great goodness to give us additional discoveries of his will and our duty for enlightening and assisting our reason, then certainly we are obliged, and it is what reason itself and the religion of nature requireth of us, to pay a regard to those discoveries; so as to believe the truths which he has been pleased to reveal, and to practise those duties which he has seen fit to enjoin: and not to do so would be highly criminal.

The four last of his twelve propositions are designed to shew, that reason and nature sufficiently instruct us without revelation, as to the methods of reconciliation with the Deity, when we have offended him by our sins, and give us a certain assurance that God will reinstate us in his favour upon our repentance and reformation. I have elsewhere considered this subject at large in answer to Tindal, who had particularly insisted upon it.‡ At present I shall only observe, that though nature and reason seem to direct us to repentance and reformation in case of our being conscious of having offended God and transgressed his holy laws, yet reason and nature could not give us certain information, how far repentance shall be available to avert the punishment we had incurred, or what shall be the extent of the divine forgiveness, or how far an obedience like ours, mixed with many failures and defects, and which falleth short in many instances of what the divine law requires, shall be rewarded. We do not know enough of God, of the reasons and ends of the divine government, and of what may be necessary for vindicating the authority of his laws, to be able to pronounce with certainty, by the mere light of our own unassisted reason, what measures his governing wisdom and righteousness may think fit to take with regard to guilty creatures that have sinned against him. Will any reasonable man pretend, that God himself cannot discover any thing to us, which it

* See before, p. 220, & seq. † Deism fairly Stated, &c. p. 37—40.

‡ The Answer to Christianity as old as the Creation, vol. i. c. 6.

may be proper for us to know, relating to the methods of his dealings towards us, the terms of our acceptance with him, or the retributions of a future state, but what we ourselves knew as well before? Or, if he should condescend to make discoveries to us of this sort, and give us assurances relating to matters of such great importance, ought we not to be thankful for such discoveries? especially since it is certain in fact, that men in all ages and nations have been under great anxieties and uncertainties about the proper means of propitiating an offended Deity.

Our author mentions it to the praise of deism, that "it is that religion of nature and reason, which was believed and practised by Socrates, and those of old," whom he represents as having been *ornaments* to human nature.* Thus he seems to think it a greater honour to be a disciple of Socrates than of Jesus Christ. But why are we to be turned back to the religion of Socrates, who have a light so vastly superior to that which he enjoyed? However he may be justly commended for having attained so far, considering the circumstances he was under (though in many things he fell in with the established superstition of his age and country), is this a reason why we should be sent to that philosopher to learn a right scheme of religion, when we have a far more excellent one in our hands, and recommended by a much higher authority? He was himself sensible of his need of farther assistances, and a divine instructor; and shall we who have that inestimable advantage, despise the light given us from heaven, and be desirous to return to that state of darkness and uncertainty of which he complained, and from which he wanted to be delivered?

The remarks that have been made will help us to judge of those passages in which he pretendeth to give the true state of the question between deists and Christians. "The single question," saith he, "between Christians and deists is, whether the belief of rational doctrines, and the practice of natural duties, are all that are strictly necessary with regard to the divine approbation, and consequently human happiness?"† And again, when he professes to come to the point, he says, "The grand foundation of the difference between the deists and the religious of all other persuasions is, whether any doctrine or precept that has not its foundation *apparently* in reason or nature, can be of the essence of religion, and with propriety be said to be a religious doctrine or precept."‡ Here he supposes, and it runs through his whole book, that nothing can be properly said to belong to religion, but what plainly appeareth to the understanding of every man, without any assistance from divine revelation, to be founded in nature and reason. The question then, though not clearly stated by this writer, is this: whether God can make any additional discoveries in relation to doctrines to be believed, or duties to be practised, concerning which we had no certain information by the bare light of unassisted nature and rea-

* Deism fairly Stated, p. 5.

† Ibid. p. 7. See also p. 8—10.

‡ Ibid. p. 14.

son? And if God hath made such discoveries, whether it would not in that case be necessary, that those to whom these discoveries are made should believe those doctrines, and practise those duties? Whether, because our own natural reason did not inform us of them without revelation, therefore when they are revealed to us, we may safely and innocently reject them as useless and unnecessary, and as not belonging to religion at all? Or whether reason and nature do not require it of us as an indispensable duty, to pay a just submission and regard to the significations and discoveries of the divine will concerning truth or duty, in whatever way they are made known to us? These are questions, which one should think would admit of an easy decision: since nothing could be more absurd, than to lay it down as a principle, that God can make no farther discoveries of truth and duty to be believed and practised by us, but what all men know of themselves by their own unassisted reason; or that, if he should, we are not obliged to receive or regard these discoveries.

It is very usual with the deistical writers, and this author among the rest, to put the question, whether reason or revelation be the best guide, as if there were an opposition or inconsistency between them: but the proper question is, whether reason left merely to itself, and with the many frailties, corruptions, and defects to which it is now subject, or reason with the assistance of divine revelation, be the best guide to duty and happiness? Revelation indeed would be of little use, if we were to take his account of it. He tells us, that by "pure revelation must be meant, that which is of such a nature as to be quite out of reason's province to form any judgment about it: That matters supernatural are incapable of an examination by natural reason, or of being approved as reasonable: And that surely no man can be rationally convinced of what lies quite out of the reach of his reasoning faculties to form any judgment at all about."* This he frequently repeats, and seems to value himself upon this way of putting the case. But it is grossly misrepresented. None of the friends of revelation understand by it, that about which we are not capable of forming any judgment at all: on the contrary, they generally agree that we must make use of our reason, both in judging of the evidences of divine revelation, whereby it is proved to be from God, and of the sense and meaning of its doctrines and precepts. But our author thinks fit to play upon the word *supernatural*, as if by it were meant that which is absolutely unintelligible and absurd; whereas a thing may be so far supernatural, that we could not have discovered it merely by our own reason without a divine revelation, and yet, when discovered to us, we may be able to form a judgment concerning it, and may see it to be worthy of God, and of an excellent tendency, and as such our reason may approve it.

Having considered that part of the pamphlet in which the author pretends to give a fair state and vindication of deism as opposed to

* Deism fairly Stated, p. 2, 24.

revelation, I shall now take some notice of what he hath advanced with regard to the Christian revelation in particular.

He says, "the material question between rational Christians and deists depends upon the proof that is made by Christians, that the Scriptures are a divine revelation, and the very word of God; for if this point be proved, the controversy is at an end." But here he complains of the want of unanimity among Christians, in a point of such importance. "The Roman Catholics say, We know the Scriptures to be the word of God, only by the testimony of the church; and among Protestants, some say, They are known to be the word of God by *themselves*, to those only whose eyes the Spirit of God is pleased to open, to perceive the characters of divine truth impressed on them: others maintain, that they will manifestly appear to be the word of God by themselves, upon an honest investigation of mere natural reason, to any man who shall impartially exercise it about them."* But if the matter be rightly considered, there is not so great a difference among Christian writers about the way of knowing the Scriptures to be the word of God, as is pretended. Christians in general are agreed, that the extraordinary facts recorded in the gospel are true, and that those facts prove the divine mission of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the truth and divinity of that scheme of religion which was published to the world in his name. They agree, that the Scriptures contain a faithful and authentic account of the doctrines and laws delivered by Christ and his apostles, and of the illustrious attestations whereby they were confirmed: That they were committed to writing by the apostles themselves, who were eye and ear witnesses of what they relate, or by their most intimate companions, and were published in the first age of the Christian church, the age in which those doctrines and laws were delivered, and the facts were done: That these writings have remarkable internal characters of truth and divinity in the goodness and excellence of the doctrines, the purity of the precepts, the force and power of the motives, that unaffected simplicity and impartial regard to truth which everywhere appears, and in the admirable tendency of the whole to promote the glory of God, and the good of mankind, without any traces or views of worldly policy, ambition, avarice, or sensuality. And though some talk of these characters as discernible by the aid of the Holy Spirit, and others by the investigation of human reason, yet neither do the former intend to exclude human reason from having any concern in that inquiry, nor do the latter design to exclude the assistance of the Holy Spirit; since it is generally acknowledged among Christians, and is highly agreeable to reason itself, that it is proper to apply to God, *the author of light, and giver of all inward illumination*, as Lord Herbert calls him, to assist us in our inquiries, and by purifying our souls from vicious affections, and corrupt prejudices, to prepare our minds for a due reception of religious and moral

* Deism fairly Stated, p. 16—24.

truth. I add, that though some have talked of corruptions in the sacred writings, yet Christians are generally agreed, that the Scriptures are transmitted to us without any such general corruption as to make any alteration in the doctrines and facts, and that they are delivered down to us by a credible uninterrupted tradition, greater than can be produced for any other books in the world; by the testimony not merely of the church in one age, but in every age, from the time in which they were written; and not merely by any one party of Christians, but by those of different sects and parties, by friends and enemies. Any one that considereth the several things now mentioned, and which have been often urged by Christians of all denominations, by the best of the Popish, as well as Protestant writers, who have appeared in defence of Christianity, will see that there is a more general agreement among them, in what concerneth the proofs of the divine original and authority of the sacred writings, than our author seems willing to allow.

With regard to *prophecy* and *miracles*, which are insisted on by all Christian writers as proofs of the divinity of the Christian religion, he will not allow them to be any proofs of it all; because they do not prove, that "the collection of tracts commonly called the Bible were written by the persons respectively whose names they bear; that the Deity immediately dictated to each writer the subject matter contained therein; and that these books have been faithfully transmitted down to us without any corruption, alteration, addition, or diminution."* Mr. Chubb has the same thought, and seems very fond of it, for he has it over and over again in his *Farewell to his Readers*. But if prophecies and miracles exhibited sufficient credentials to the divine mission of our Lord Jesus Christ and of his apostles, who published to the world the doctrines and laws of the Christian religion; and if the Scriptures contain a just and faithful account of those prophecies and miracles, and of the doctrines and laws so attested and confirmed, and delivered by those divinely authorized teachers: doth not this lay a just foundation for receiving those doctrines and laws as of divine authority? As to their being written by the persons whose names they bear, and their being safely transmitted to us, without any material corruption or alteration, this needeth no miracles to prove it; it must be proved by other mediums, such as by the acknowledgment of all mankind are sufficient to prove things of that kind. If these writings can be traced up, as they certainly may, from our own times, by unquestionable evidence, to the very age in which they were written; and if they have been all along acknowledged to have been written by those to whom they are ascribed, and even the enemies who lived nearest those times never contested it; and if it can be demonstrated, that, as the case was circumstanced, a general corruption of those writings in the doctrines and facts, if any had attempted it, would have been an impossible thing; this

* Deism fairly Stated, p. 22, 26.

ought to satisfy an impartial inquirer; and this is capable of as clear a proof as the nature of the thing can admit, and which, as hath been already hinted, is superior to what can be produced for any other book in the world. And the man that would doubt of such evidence in any other case, would be looked upon as ridiculously scrupulous, and be thought to carry his scepticism to an unreasonable height.

As to the subject matter of the Christian revelation, this writer is for stripping it of every doctrine that is founded in nature and reason; though there are several important doctrines of that kind, *e. g.* those relating to the attributes and providence of God, and a state of future retributions, which Christianity was manifestly intended to confirm and establish, and set in a clearer light. If we are to take his account of it, it consisteth wholly of *speculative, metaphysical, unintelligible* doctrines, which lie out of the reach of reason to determine whether they be true or false, or to pass any judgment at all about them; and of positive institutions, which he pretends by the confession of Christian divines are no *constituent parts of religion*.* By saying they are no constituent parts of religion, he evidently intends, that they have nothing to do with religion, and are of no use or significance at all; whereas the divines he refers to agree, that the positive institutions of Christianity do belong to religion as valuable instrumental duties, which have a tendency to subserve and promote the great ends of all religion, and are, when rightly improved, of signal use and benefit.

After having observed, that many parts of Scripture are *mysterious* and *unintelligible*, he saith, that to suppose that God *gives forth unintelligible instructions and propositions to his creatures, is to prove him, in fact, a mere trifler*.† And he urges, that "as certain as a being of perfect rectitude has given a revelation, so certain it is, that not any thing in that revelation can be found on a strict inquiry unrevealed, *i. e.* not understood by men of learning, penetration, diligence, and industry."‡ The design of this is to insinuate, that if there be any one thing in the Bible, even in the prophetic parts of it, which is not understood by men of learning and diligence, the whole is false; or if there be any circumstance in the revelation obscure, it cannot be a true divine revelation. But may it not reasonably be supposed, that in a revelation designed not merely for any one particular age, but for the use of mankind in every succeeding age, as there are many things, and those of the greatest importance, sufficiently clear and intelligible at all times, so there may be some things not well understood at one time, which afterwards are cleared up by farther inquiry, or a more diligent search, or by comparing predictions with events? Or, may not things which are revealed to us as far as it is necessary they should be so, yet have some things attending them, the manner of which we are not able

* Deism fairly Stated, p. 2, 6, 16, 24, 58. † Ibid. p. 26, 34. ‡ Ibid. p. 83.

clearly to explain and understand? Is not this the case of many important points of what is called natural religion, relating to the providence and attributes of God, the divine eternity, immensity, omniscience, the creation of the world, &c.? And must we reject what we do understand, and the great usefulness of which we clearly apprehend, because there is something relating to it which we cannot distinctly conceive!

As to the objections he makes against some particular doctrines of Christianity, as unintelligible and absurd, or at least as absolutely useless, this entirely depends upon the strange and unfair representation he has been pleased to make of them. Thus he supposes Christians to maintain it as a doctrine of Scripture, that "an original, un compounded, immaterial, and pure spirit, should, like one of the derived, compounded, material, human species, have a Son."* As if Christians understood God's having a Son, in the same gross, literal, and carnal sense in which one man begets another.

He pronounces, that "the supposed satisfaction for sin by Christ's death is a doctrine entirely repugnant to reason, and as such ought to be rejected with scorn."† Mr. Chubb has passed the same censure upon it, which is owing to the absurd light in which he has thought fit to represent it, concerning which see before. But the doctrine of our redemption and reconciliation through the obedience and sufferings of our Lord Jesus Christ, considered as taught in the holy Scriptures, hath nothing in it but what is worthy of God, and of an excellent tendency.

He mentions another doctrine, which he owns to be intelligible enough, but represents it as good for nothing, and as of no more consequence to the world in general, than there being a burning mountain in the kingdom of Naples, is an advantage to the people of England. And he thinks "it is greatly improbable, that God should especially interpose to acquaint the world with what mankind would do altogether as well without."‡ The doctrine he here refers to is that of God's judging the world by Jesus Christ. But this, rightly considered, is a noble part of the gospel scheme, and capable of being improved to the most excellent purposes. It renders the whole harmonious and consistent, in that the same glorious and divine Person by whom God made the world, and by whom as the great instrument he carried on his gracious designs for recovering mankind from their ruinous and lost estate, is appointed to be the judge of all men, and dispenser of future retributions. And what farther shews the propriety of appointing Christ to be the judge is, that this is the last perfective act of the kingdom and dominion committed to him as Mediator, and that it is to be regarded as a reward of his amazing humiliation and self-abasement, and of his unparalleled obedience and sufferings in our nature, in compliance with his heavenly father's will. To which it may be added, that nothing can be fuller of comfort to good men, than that the benevolent Saviour of mankind will judge the

* Deism fairly Stated, p. 66. † Ibid. p. 41.

‡ Deism fairly Stated, p. 35.

world in the father's name ; since it yields a satisfactory proof, that it is the will of God, that the judgment should be conducted, not with the utmost rigour of unallayed justice, but with great equity, so as to make all proper allowances for human weakness and infirmity, as far as is consistent with unbiassed truth and righteousness. And at the same time it hath a manifest tendency to strike an awe into the impenitent rejecters of the divine grace and goodness, to consider that they must be accountable to that Lord and Saviour whom they rejected and despised. What a mighty enforcement must it give to his authority and laws, that he himself shall call us to an account as to our obedience or disobedience to those laws, and will have it in his power to fulfil his own glorious promises to them that believe and obey him, and to execute his awful threatenings against the finally impenitent and disobedient.

There are several other things he repeats which are urged by almost every deistical writer, and which I have had occasion frequently to mention, such as the contradictory interpretations put on several passages of Scripture, different translations, errors of transcribers, &c. But that which he seems to lay a particular stress upon is the corruption of Christians. He speaks of the *abominable wickedness that has rode triumphant* in the Christian world : and that "the Americans have too much reason to consider the coming of Christians and "Christianity among them as the greatest evil and curse that ever befel them.*" But if professed Christians have made religion a cover for their ambition, avarice, and cruelty, Christianity is not accountable for this. And whosoever considers the best accounts of the Americans before Christianity came among them ; their gross ignorance and barbarity, their human sacrifices, and the abominable vices and customs which prevailed among them,† must be sensible, that if the pure religion of Jesus, as taught in the gospel by Christ and his apostles, had been published and received among them in its genuine purity and simplicity, it would have been the happiest thing that could have befallen them ; and the greatest fault is, that little care has been taken to instruct them and the other heathen nations, in the true Christian religion as delivered in the holy Scriptures. Notwithstanding the corruptions so complained of in the Christian world, it is undeniable, that what there is of knowledge and true religion among men, is principally where Christianity is professed. But if all were true that is pretended concerning the depravity of those that call themselves Christians, it would only prove, that they are very much fallen from the religion they profess, but not that Christianity itself is false, or was not originally from God. Whilst it can be shewn, as it may be with the utmost evidence, that considered in itself, and as contained in the Scriptures, it is of the most excellent tendency, and that the uniform design of its doctrines, precepts, promises, and threatenings, is to promote the cause of virtue and righteousness in the world, and to reclaim men from vice and wickedness ; it is certainly very unreasonable and

* Deism fairly Stated, p. 47, 48. † Bayle's Dictionary, article Leon [Peter Cuccade].

unfair to make Christianity answerable for the abuses and corruptions it condemneth. If every thing must be rejected which hath been abused, government and civil polity, knowledge and literature, religion, liberty, and reason itself, must be discarded.

One of the most remarkable things in the tract we are now considering is, that the author will not allow that the moral precepts of Christianity properly belong to it all, or make any part of the Christian religion. He pretends, that Christian divines, in order to render Christianity amiable, have decked her with the graceful ornaments of moral precepts; whereas in Christianity the moral precepts are but borrowed ware, the property of the deists, and as much distinguished from Christianity, as Christianity is from Mahometanism. Thus he hath found out an admirable expedient to strip Christianity of what hath been hitherto esteemed one of its principal glories. The holy and excellent precepts which the great Author of our religion taught and enjoined in the name of God, and to enforce which by the most weighty and important motives was one great design of his and his apostles' ministry, do not, it seems, belong to Christianity at all. Moral precepts, according to this writer, make no part of divine revelation, and of the scheme of religion delivered in the Gospel; though to clear and shew them in their just extent, and enforce them by a divine authority, and by the most prevailing motives, seems to be one of the noblest ends for which a divine revelation could be given to mankind. Supposing, which was really the case, that the world was sunk into an amazing darkness and corruption, there was nothing that was more wanted than to have a pure system of morals, containing the whole of our duty with respect to God, our neighbours, and ourselves, delivered, not as the opinions of wise men and philosophers, but as the laws of God himself, and enforced by all the sanctions of a divine authority, and by all the charms of a divine grace and goodness. This is what hath been done by the Christian revelation; and its great usefulness to this purpose, and the need the world stood in of it, is excellently represented by Mr. Locke, in his *Reasonableness of Christianity*,* quoted at large by Dr. Benson in his remarks on this pamphlet, who very justly observes, that this great man had fully obviated before-hand all that the author of *Deism fairly Stated* hath advanced on this subject.

The last argument he urgeth against the Christian revelation is drawn from its not having been universally spread in all ages and nations. I shall not say any thing here to this objection, which hath been often repeated and answered. It had been particularly insisted upon by Dr. Tindal, and was fully considered in the answers that were made to him. Some notice was taken of it in the observations on Lord Herbert's scheme. And it may be observed, as Mr. Chubb himself seems to think, that no great stress should be laid upon it; and he will not take upon him to affirm, that the non-universality of a revelation is a just objection against its divinity.†

Soon after *Deism fairly Stated*, &c. appeared, Dr. Benson pub-

* Locke's Works, vol. ii. p. 575—579. 4th edit.

† Posthumous Works, vol. i. p. 218, 219.

lished animadversions upon it, in the second edition of the *Reasonableness of Christianity as delivered in the Scriptures*, London, 1746: To which there is added an appendix, in which he solidly vindicates the arguments he had offered in his *Reasonableness of Christianity*, &c. against the exceptions of this writer, and charges him not only with false reasonings, but with gross misrepresentations. The same charge is urged against him in a tract published by the Reverend Mr. Capel Berrow, though without his name, intitled, *Deism not consistent with the Religion of Nature and Reason*;—"wherein are obviated the most popular objections brought against Christianity, those especially which are urged by a moral philosopher, in a late extraordinary pamphlet, styled *Deism fairly Stated, and fully Vindicated*, in a letter to a friend—London, 1751." There were other answers to *Deism fairly Stated*, which I have not seen. I shall conclude my reflections upon it with observing, that this pamphlet furnishes remarkable instances to verify the observation I had occasion to make before* concerning the unfair conduct of the deistical writers, and the strange liberties they take in misrepresenting the sense of the Christian writers whom they quote.

It may not be improper here to take some notice of the attempt made against the authority of the sacred writings in the late Lord Bolingbroke's *Letters on the Study and Use of History*. In some of these letters he hath used his utmost efforts to subvert the credit of the scripture history; but the method he has made use of to this purpose seems not to be well chosen, nor consistent with itself. A principal reason which his Lordship produces to invalidate the credit and authority of the old Testament history is, that the Greeks were not acquainted with it; and that their accounts, particularly with regard to the Assyrian empire, do not agree with the accounts given of it in Scripture. And yet he himself has taken great pains to shew that the ancient Greeks were fabulous writers, and that their accounts, of ancient times, either with regard to other nations, or their own, are not to be depended on: and accordingly he hath let us know, that if they had perfectly agreed with the accounts given in the Jewish Scriptures, he would have had very little regard to them, and would not have looked upon this to be any argument of their truth. Many learned writers have produced testimonies from heathen authors, tending to strengthen some remarkable passages in the scripture history. This his Lordship finds great fault with, and chargeth it as a most partial and absurd conduct to admit the testimony of the heathen writers, if they happen at any time to agree with the scripture accounts, and to reject their testimony when against them. But if the matter be fairly weighed, there is nothing in this but what is very reasonable: for, considering the strong prejudices of the heathens against the Jews, whose whole religion and policy were so opposite to theirs, it is evident that no great stress can be laid upon what they say against them, and their history; and yet if any thing be found in their writings, which tendeth to confirm the facts recorded

* See above, let. vii.

in the Jewish sacred books, it is just to take advantage of this; since it is plain this could not be owing to a favourable prepossession towards the Jews, or their histories, but to the force of truth, or to some traditions which they looked upon as authentic. For though the testimonies are not much to be regarded, when they are to the prejudice of those for whom they have a declared aversion, yet the testimony of enemies in favour of those to whom they are known to be enemies, has been always looked upon to be of great weight.

In order to invalidate the Scripture history, his Lordship has thought fit to repeat what had been often mentioned by the writers on that side: That the Jewish sacred books were lost in the Babylonish captivity; that there have been such corruptions and alterations in the copies, that there can be no dependence upon them; that there is no proof of the Gospels having been written in the apostolic age; that they were not distinguished from the spurious gospels; that there had been formerly evidence against Christianity, but that it was destroyed; that the Christian clergy, through whose hands the Scriptures have been transmitted to us, were guilty of numberless frauds and corruptions: and that the many differences among Christians about the sense of Scripture show, that it is absolutely uncertain; and that there is now no certain standard of Christianity at all. These and other objections, which his Lordship hath displayed with no small ostentation, I shall not here take any particular notice of, having considered and obviated them in the *Reflections on Lord Bolingbroke's Letters on the Study and Use of History, especially as far as they relate to Christianity and the Holy Scriptures*, published at London, 8vo. 1753. About the same time, the Right Reverend the Lord Bishop of Clogher published *A Vindication of the Histories of the Old and New Testament, in Answer to the Objections of the late Lord Bolingbroke*: in which he hath both detected and exposed several mistakes his Lordship had fallen into with respect to other ancient authors whom he cites, and hath vindicated the sacred writings against the attempts made in those Letters to invalidate their credit and divine authority.—These, with Mr. Harvey's *Remarks on Lord Bolingbroke's Letters, as far as they relate to the History of the Old Testament*, are the only answers I have seen to his Lordship's *Letters on the Study and Use of History*. But we shall soon have occasion to return to this noble Lord, who afterwards, in his posthumous works, appeared still more openly against the Christian cause, and even against what have been hitherto accounted some of the most important principles of natural religion.

LETTER XVI.

Mr. Hume, a subtle and ingenious Writer, but extremely sceptical and fond of Novelty.

—He proposes to free Metaphysics from that Jargon and Obscurity which has served only as a Shelter to Superstition and Error.—His Doctrine concerning the Relation of Cause and Effect examined.—He declares, that the Knowledge of this Relation is of the highest Importance, and that all our Reasons concerning Matter of Fact and Experience, and concerning the Existence of any Being, are founded upon it.—Yet he sets himself to show, that there is no real Connexion between Cause and Effect, and that there can be no certain, nor even probable, reasoning from the one to the other.—Reflections upon the great Absurdity and pernicious Consequences of this Scheme—The Inconsistencies this Writer hath fallen into.

SIR,

I now send you some observations upon Mr. Hume, an ingenious writer, who hath lately appeared against the Christian cause, and that in a manner which seems to have something new in it, and different from what others had written before him, especially in what he calls his *Philosophical Essays concerning Human Understanding*. The second edition of this book, with additions and corrections, which is what I have now before me, was published in London, 1750. This gentleman must be acknowledged to be a subtle writer, of a very metaphysical genius, and has a neat and agreeable manner of expression. But it is obvious to every judicious reader, that he hath, in many instances, carried scepticism to an unreasonable height; and seemeth everywhere to affect an air of making new observations and discoveries. His writings seem, for the most part, to be calculated rather to amuse, or even confound, than to instruct and enlighten the understanding; and there are not a few things in them, which strike at the foundation of natural, as well as the proofs and evidences of revealed, religion. This appeareth to me to be, in a particular manner, the character of his *Philosophical Essays*: and you will, perhaps, be of the same opinion, when you have considered the remarks I now send you.

If we were to form a judgment of these Essays, from the account he himself is pleased to give of them, and of his intention in writing them, our notion of them would be highly to their advantage. Having taken notice of the abstractedness of metaphysical speculations, he says, that he has, "in the following Essays, endeavoured to throw some light upon subjects, from which uncertainty has hitherto deterred the wise, and obscurity the ignorant." He proposes "to unite the boundaries of the different species of philosophy, by reconciling profound inquiry with clearness, and truth with novelty;" and thinks "it will be happy, if, reasoning in this easy manner, he can undermine the foundations of an abstruse philosophy, which seems to have served hitherto only as a shelter

to superstition, and a cover to absurdity and error."* He undertakes to "banish all that jargon, which has so long taken possession of metaphysical reasonings, and drawn such disgrace upon them."† And after having represented *all the received systems of philosophy*, and all *common theories, as extremely defective*, he promises to "avoid all jargon and confusion, in treating of such subtle and profound subjects."‡

That part of these Essays, which I shall first take notice of, and which is indeed of a very uncommon strain, and seems to lie at the foundation of many of those extraordinary things which he afterwards advances, is what he proposes to consider, p. 47, § *seq.*; where he observes, that "it is a subject worthy curiosity, to inquire, what is the nature of that evidence, which assures us of any real existence and matter of fact, beyond the present testimony of our senses, or the records of our memory." He observes, that "this part of philosophy has been little cultivated either by the ancients or moderns:" but though it is difficult, it may be "useful, by destroying that implicit faith and credulity, which is the bane of all reasoning and free inquiry."§ After such a pompous profession, one would be apt to expect something extremely deserving of our attention. Let us therefore examine into his scheme, that we may know what it really is; and then our way will be clear to make the necessary remarks upon it.

He observes, that "the relation of cause and effect is necessary to the subsistence of our species, and the regulation of our conduct in every circumstance and occurrence of human life. Without this, we should never have been able to adjust means to ends, nor employ our rational powers either to the producing of good, or avoiding of evil."|| And, accordingly, he expressly declares, that "if there be any relation, any object, which it imports us to know perfectly, it is that of cause and effect: on this we found all our reasonings, concerning matter of fact and experience; and by this alone we retain any assurance concerning objects, that are removed from the present testimony of our memory and senses:" and that "the existence of any Being can only be known by arguments from its cause, or its effect."** It appeareth then, that by his own acknowledgment, it is of the highest importance to know the relation of cause and effect. Let us now see what instruction he gives us with regard to that relation.

He absolutely denies, that this relation can possibly be known *a priori*, and asserts, that it entirely arises from experience:†† that it is this only "that teaches us the nature and bounds of cause and effect, and enables us to infer the existence of one object from that of another."‡‡ But he takes a great deal of pains to show that experience cannot furnish a reasonable foundation for such an inference. He had laid it down as a principle, that all arguments

* Philosophical Essays, p. 18, 19.

† Ibid. p. 97, 106, 107.

‡ Ibid., p. 89, 90.

†† Ibid. p. 50, 52, 53.

† Ibid. p. 27, 28.

§ Ibid. p. 47, 48, 49.

** Ibid. p. 123, 258.

‡‡ Ibid. p. 258.

from experience can at best only be probable; but he will not allow even this in the present case: he sets himself to prove, that "not so much as any probable arguments can be drawn from cause to effect, or from effect to cause:"* that "the conjunction of the effect with the cause is entirely arbitrary, not only in its first conception, *a priori*, but after it is suggested by experience:"† that, "indeed, in fact, we infer the one from the other; but that this is not by a chain of reasoning; nor is there any medium which may enable the mind to draw such an inference.‡ The only ground of such an inference is, the supposed resemblance between the past and future: but that it is impossible any argument from experience should prove that resemblance: and yet if there be not such a resemblance, all experience becomes useless, and can give rise to no inference or conclusion."§ He positively asserts, that "we know only by experience the frequent conjunction of objects, without being ever able to comprehend anything like connexion between them."|| And he frequently observes, that the connexion is only in our own thoughts or conceptions, not in the things themselves; and resolves the conjunction between cause and effect, and the inference drawn from the one to the other, wholly into custom; that it is a "customary connexion in the thought or imagination betwixt one object, and its usual attendant;"** that custom, he always calls a *habit*;†† and represents it as owing to a repetition of acts; at other times, he ascribes it to an *instinct*, or *mechanical tendency*, and represents it as a necessary *act of the mind*, and *infallible in its operations*:‡‡ yet afterwards, speaking of the same custom or instinct, he says, that, like *other instincts*, it may be *fallacious and deceitful*.§§

The great argument he produces, and upon which he lays the greatest stress, to show that we can have no certainty in our conclusions concerning the relation of cause and effect, nor reason from one to the other, is, that we have no idea of that connexion which unites the effect to the cause, or of the force, power, or energy, in the cause, which produces the effect; nor consequently, any medium whereby we can infer the one from the other. He sets himself particularly to show, that neither external objects give us the idea of power, nor reflections on the operations of our own minds.¶¶

If what our author offers on this head had been only to display the subtlety of his metaphysical genius, and show how little we are able distinctly to explain the manner even of those things of which we have the greatest certainty, we should have allowed him to amuse himself, and his readers, with a little philosophical play. But what he here advances, concerning cause and effect, power and connexion, he makes the foundation of conclusions relating to matters of great importance,—

* Philosophical Essays, p. 62, 63. † Ibid. p. 53, 54.

§ Ibid. p. 65, 66. || Ibid. p. 114.

†† Ibid. p. 73, 74, 91, 120. ‡‡ Ibid. 73, 91.

¶¶ Ibid. p. 105, 106.

‡ Ibid. p. 60, 61.

** Ibid. p. 123.

§§ Ibid. p. 251.

———*Hæ nugæ seria ducunt*
In mala———

By endeavouring to destroy all reasoning from causes to effects, or from effects to causes, and not allowing that we can so much as probably infer the one from the other, by arguing either *a priori*, or from experience, he subverts, as far as in him lies, the very foundation of those reasonings, that are drawn from the effects which we behold in the frame of the universe, to the existence of one supreme, intelligent, all-powerful cause; and accordingly we shall find that he himself afterwards applies this principle to this very purpose. Another use that he makes of this doctrine concerning cause and effect is, what we would not have expected from it, to confound all difference between physical and moral causes; and to show that the latter have the same kind of causality with the former. This is the purport of his eighth essay, which is concerning *liberty* and *necessity*.* though if he argued consistently, he must deny that there is any such thing in nature as *necessity*, or *necessary connexion*; or that there is either physical or moral cause at all.

You will scarce expect, that I should enter upon a laborious confutation of so whimsical a scheme, though proposed to the world with great pomp, and represented by the author himself as of *vast importance*. I shall content myself with making some general observations upon it.

And first, whereas this writer frequently, throughout these essays, lays a mighty stress upon experience, as the great guide of human life, and the only foundation of all other knowledge, especially with respect to matter of fact, and the existence of objects, he here plainly endeavours to show, that there can be no argument from experience at all; nor can any reasonable conclusion be drawn from it: for he will not allow, that argument can be drawn or inference made from experience, but what is founded on the supposed relation or connexion betwixt cause and effect. If therefore there be no relation or connexion between cause and effect at all, in the nature of things, which it is the whole design of his reasoning on this subject to shew, then all certainty of experience, all proof from it, entirely fail; all experience, as he himself expresses it, *becomes useless, and can give rise to no inference or conclusion.*†

Secondly, Another remark I would make upon Mr. Hume's way of arguing is, that it proceeds upon a wrong foundation, and which is contrary to truth and reason, viz. that we cannot have any reasonable certainty of the truth of a thing, or that it really is, when we cannot distinctly explain the manner of it, or how it is. The sum of his argumentation, as I have already hinted with relation to cause and effect, is, that we cannot be certain of any such thing as power or energy, because we cannot conceive or explain precisely wherein it consists, or how it operates. But this is a very fallacious way of reasoning. Though we cannot metaphysically explain the manner

* Philosophical Essays, p. 129, and seq.

† Ibid. p. 66.

in which the cause operateth upon the effect, yet we may, in many cases, be sure that there is a connexion between them; and that where there are certain effects produced, there are powers correspondent or adequate to the production of those effects. The mind, in such cases, when it sees an effect produced, is led, by a quick and undoubted process of reasoning, to acknowledge that there must be a cause which hath the power of producing it; or else we must say, that it is produced without any cause at all, or that nothing in nature hath any power of producing it; which is the greatest of all absurdities. He urgeth, that "it must be allowed, that when we know a power, we know that very circumstance in the cause, by which it is enabled to produce the effect." And then he asks, "Do we pretend to be acquainted with the nature of the human soul and the nature of an idea, or the aptitude of the one to produce the other?"* But certainly we may know, that there is something in the cause which produceth the effect, though we cannot distinctly explain what that circumstance in the cause is, by which it is enabled to produce it. We must not deny, that there is in the mind a power of raising up ideas, and recalling them, and fixing the attention upon them, because we cannot explain how this is done. The argument Mr. Hume offers to prove, that we can have no assurance of the reality of force or power, viz. because we cannot distinctly conceive or explain how it operateth, would equally prove, that we cannot be sure that we have any ideas at all, because we cannot well explain the nature of an ideas, or how it is formed in the mind. He himself, on another occasion, observes against Malebranche, and the modern Cartesians, who deny all power and activity in second causes, and ascribe all to God; that "we are indeed ignorant of the manner in which bodies operate upon one another; and so we are of the manner or force by which the mind, even the supreme mind, operates, either on itself or on body. Were our ignorance therefore a sufficient reason for rejecting any thing, we should be led into that principle of refusing all energy to the Supreme Being, as much as to the grossest matter."† He here seems to censure it as a wrong way of arguing, to deny that a thing is, because we cannot distinctly conceive the manner how it is; or to make our ignorance of any thing a sufficient reason for rejecting it; and yet it is manifest, that his own reasoning against power or causality, force or energy, depends upon this principle; and indeed, by comparing the several parts of his scheme, there is too much reason to apprehend, that he had it in view to deny all force and energy, and all power whatsoever, in the Supreme as well as in secondary causes; or at least to represent it as very uncertain. I think this gentleman would have done better to have said, as a late ingenious author of his own country, "We have no adequate idea of power; we see evidently that there must be such a thing in nature; but we cannot conceive how it acts, nor what connects the producing cause with the produced effect." Che-

* Philosophical Essays, p. 110, 111.

† Ibid. p. 117, 118.

valier Ramsay's principles of natural and revealed religion, vol. i. p. 109.

Thirdly, A third remark is, that many of our author's arguings on this subject are contrary to the most evident dictates of common sense. Such is that, where he asserts, that not so much as a probable argument can be drawn, in any case, from experience, concerning the connexion betwixt cause and effect; or from whence we may conclude, that from a similar cause we may expect similar effects.* Thus, *e. g.* according to his way of reasoning, it cannot so much as probably be concluded from experience, that if a quantity of dry gunpowder be laid in any place, and fire be applied to it, it will cause an explosion; or that if it hath such an effect to-day, a like quantity of powder, the same way circumstanced, will produce the same effect to-morrow. No probable reason can be brought to show, that that which has had the effect in thousands of instances in time past, will, though all circumstances appear perfectly similar, have the same effect in time future. He grants, indeed, that, in such cases, the mind is determined to draw the inference; yet he asserts, that the understanding has no part in the operation. But surely, when, from observation and experience, we come to know and judge of the ordinary course of nature, the understanding may justly draw a probable argument or conclusion, that from such and such causes, so circumstanced, such effects will follow. This inference is perfectly rational. And it is a strange way of talking, that, even from a number of uniform experiments, we cannot so much as probably infer a connexion between the cause and the effect, the sensible qualities and the secret powers. The reason he gives, is, that "if there be any suspicion, that the course of nature may change, and that the past may be no rule for the future, experience can give rise to no inference or conclusion."† But is the probability of a thing destroyed, according to any way of reasoning allowed hitherto, because it is barely possible it may happen otherwise, though there are ten thousand to one against it? Mr. Hume elsewhere, when arguing against miracles, lays it down as a principle, that there is a constant uniformity in the course of nature, never to be violated; but here, in order to show, that no probable reason can be brought from experience, concerning the connexion of cause and effect, he supposes, that there may be a suspicion that the course of nature may change. Thus this gentleman knows how to assume and alter principles, as best suits his own present convenience. Reason leadeth us to conclude, that the course of nature is the appointment and constitution of that most wise and powerful Being, who made the world, and settled that law and order which he judged fittest and properest; and then reason leadeth us also to conclude, that, except in very extraordinary cases, the same order will continue; and extraordinary cases do not hinder the probability of the ordinary course. So that reason affords a proper medium for a probable conclusion con-

* Philosophical Essays, p. 61—63.

† Ibid. p. 65, 66.

cerning what effects are to be expected. He affirms, indeed, that all inferences of this kind are only the effects of custom or habit, not of reasoning.* But why is custom or habit here mentioned in opposition to reason, or as exclusive of it? May they not both concur? It is evident that they often go together, and mutually strengthen one another. Custom alone, without reason, is often not to be depended on; but in this case reason gives its suffrage; and, in all arguings in experimental philosophy, reason argues from similar causes to similar effects. It is by reason we draw those inferences, and the inferences are rational. It must not be said, that in this case there is no reasoning at all; but that the reasoning is often so obvious, that it carries conviction by the very constitution of the human mind, which naturally acquiesceth in it as satisfactory. It seems evident, that the great Author of our being hath formed our minds, so as to reason in this manner; and he would not have done this, if it had not been both of great use in human life to make such inferences, and if there were not a real foundation for it in the nature of things. This writer himself owns, that "none but a fool or a madman will ever pretend to dispute the authority of experience, or to reject that great guide of human life: but he thinks it may be allowed a philosopher to have so much curiosity as to examine the principle of human nature, which gives this weighty authority to experience.†" But I cannot help thinking, that if we were to judge of philosophy by the specimen this gentleman hath given of it in this instance, many would be apt to conclude, that there is a great difference, and even opposition, between philosophy and common sense; that what is so obvious and apparent to the common sense and reason of mankind, that he is a fool and a madman who doubts of it, yet in philosophy is not so much as probable.

Another instance, in which our author's scheme is not very reconcilable to the common sentiments of mankind, is, that he says, that "though we learn, by experience, the frequent *conjunction* of objects, yet we are unable to comprehend any thing like *connexion* between them; and that there appears not in all nature any thing like *connexion*, conceivable by us; all events are entirely loose and separate; one event follows another; but we never observe any tie betwixt them; they seem conjoined, but never connected."‡ But it is evident, that in many cases we have a distinct idea of conjunction or contiguity, as in a heap of sand; and of connexion, as betwixt cause and effect; and the connexion in this case is not merely in our thoughts, as this gentleman is pleased to represent it; but this very connexion in our thoughts is founded on a connexion which we perceive in the things themselves. They are not connected as cause and effect, because we think them so; but we perceive them to be connected, because we find they are so: nor is this owing merely to a custom or habit in our minds, but there is in nature a real foundation for it.

* Philosophical Essays, p. 73, 74, & passim.
‡ Ibid. p. 120.

† Ibid. 63, 66.

Fourthly, Another remark which occurs to me upon considering Mr. Hume's scheme, is, that he hath fallen into several inconsistencies and contradictions; and, indeed, it is not to be wondered at, that a man who argueth against common sense, however subtle and ingenious he may otherwise be, should also be inconsistent with himself. I have already taken notice of the passages in which he representeth experience as uncertain, and that not so much as a probable argument can be drawn from it; and yet in his sixth essay; which is concerning *probability*, he shews that experience may not only furnish probable conclusions, but what he calls *proofs*; which he explains to be such arguments from experience, as leave no room for doubt or opposition*. And he frequently speaks of experience in very high terms, as a certain guide. Again, in several passages above referred to, he expressly declares, that in making experimental conclusions, there is no place for *reasoning*; that the inference in this case is entirely owing to custom, and the understanding has no part in it; and yet he elsewhere owns, that there is great scope of *reasoning* in inferences of this kind from observation and experience; and that not only men greatly surpass the inferior animals in this way of reasoning, but that one man very much excels another.† And he declares, that "all our *reasonings* are founded on a species of analogy; where the causes are entirely similar, the analogy is perfect; and the inference drawn from it is regarded as certain and conclusive;"‡ though he had said, that "it is impossible that any arguments from experience can prove such a resemblance."§ Another inconsistency, which may be observed in Mr. Hume's reasoning on this subject, is, that though he represents the connexion betwixt cause and effect to be only a connexion in our thoughts, not in the things themselves,|| yet he asserts, that "there is a kind of pre-established harmony between the course of nature, and the succession of our ideas; and though the powers and forces, by which the former is governed, be wholly unknown to us, yet our thoughts and conceptions have still, we find, gone on in the same train with other works of nature;"** where he seems to suppose, that there is a real connexion in the nature of things, to which the connexion in our minds correspondeth. The general strain of his arguing in several of his essays, seems to be designed to prove, if it proves any thing, that we cannot be sure that there is any such thing as cause or causal connexion in the universe; yet he says, "it is universally allowed that nothing exists without a cause of its existence; and that chance is a negative word, and means not any real power which has any where a being in nature."†† Here he falls into the common way of speaking, that every thing which existeth must have a cause of its existence; otherwise we must acknowledge the operation of chance. And he observes, that "there is no such thing as chance in the world."‡‡ Causes therefore must be acknowledged,

* Philosophical Essays, p. 93.

† Ibid., p. 170, 171.

‡ Ibid., p. 165.

§ Ibid., p. 66.

|| Ibid., p. 123, 126.

** Ibid., p. 90.

†† Ibid., p. 151.

‡‡ Ibid., p. 93.

though we cannot explain the manner of their causality. And he himself, in reckoning up the principles of the connexion of our ideas, distinctly mentions *resemblance*, *contiguity*, and *causation*; and this last he makes to be the most common and useful of all;* and yet, in the course of his reasoning, he really leaves no place for *causation*, distinct from *similarity* or *resemblance*, and *contiguity*. It may be mentioned, as another instance of his inconsistency, that he frequently makes *power* and *necessary connexion* the same thing; and argues, that if there be any connexion between cause and effect at all, it must be a necessary one; for that cannot be called a cause, that is not necessarily connected with the effect;† and yet, in his *Essay on liberty and necessity*, when speaking of the influence of motives upon the mind, he saith, that, “as this influence is *usually* conjoined with the action, it must be esteemed a cause, and be looked upon as an instance of the necessity which we would establish;”‡ where he plainly supposeth, that it is not essential to the notion of a cause, that it is infallibly and always connected with the effect; but that it is sufficient, if it be usually joined with it. And to the same purpose, he saith, that “all causes are not conjoined to their usual effects, with like constancy and uniformity.”§ Indeed, his whole *Essay on Liberty and Necessity*, though seemingly built upon the scheme he had advanced in his foregoing *Essays*, with relation to cause and effect, is really not reconcilable to it. In all his reasonings in these *Essays*, concerning cause and effect, he had argued, that there is no such thing as *necessary connexion*, or indeed any connexion at all, betwixt cause and effect; and upon this scheme, it is idle to talk of a necessity either in physical or moral causes. And yet in his *Essay on Liberty and Necessity*, he plainly argues upon the supposition of a real connexion; though he will only call it a conjunction betwixt cause and effect. And he all along supposeth the influence of causes, and the power of motives; and that a necessity must be acknowledged in moral as well as physical causes. He would have us to begin the question concerning Liberty and Necessity, not “by examining the faculties of the soul, but by examining the operations of body, and of brute unintelligent matter.”|| And with regard to this, he observes, that “it is universally allowed, that matter, in all its operations, is actuated by a necessary force; and that every effect is so precisely determined by the nature and energy of its cause, that no other effect, in such particular circumstances, could possibly have resulted from the operation of its cause;”** and he expressly asserteth, that “the conjunction betwixt motives and voluntary actions, is as regular and uniform as that betwixt the cause and effect, in any part of nature.”†† Thus we see, that he can acknowledge cause and effect, and the connexion betwixt them, when he has a mind to take advantage of this, for overthrowing the liberty of human actions. And he con-

* *Philosophical Essays*, p. 32, 84.† *Ibid.*, p. 138.† *Ibid.*, p. 93, 103, 151.|| *Ibid.*, p. 147.†† *Ibid.*, p. 141.‡ *Ibid.*, p. 154.** *Ibid.*, p. 131, 132.

cludes the Essay, with taking notice of the objection which might be raised against what he had advanced, *viz.*, that "if voluntary actions be subjected to the same laws of necessity with the operations of matter, there is a continued chain of necessary causes, pre-ordained and pre-determined, reaching from the original cause of all, to every single volition of every human creature. While we act, we are at the same time acted upon. There is no contingency anywhere in the universe, no indifferency, no liberty." This objection he putteth very strongly;* and yet I cannot see, that, according to the hypothesis he had advanced in the foregoing Essays, there can be any just foundation for it; for if there be only a mere conjunction of events, but no causal influence, it cannot be said, that, whilst we act, we are acted upon. On the contrary, nothing is acted upon, nor is there any power, force, or energy in nature. All events are loose, separate, and unconnected, and only follow one another without connexion; and therefore there can be no continued chain of necessary causes at all. This would be the proper answer, according to the principles he had laid down, if he had thought those principles would bear. But he hath not thought fit to make use of it; but, in contradiction to his own scheme, seems here to admit a chain of necessary causes, physical and moral, in order to load Providence; and plainly represents the objection as unanswerable.†

Thus I have considered, pretty largely, our author's extraordinary scheme; and the observations that have been made may help us to judge of this gentleman's character as a writer, whether it deserveth all the admiration and applause, which he himself, as well as others, have been willing to bestow upon it. We may see, by what hath been observed, how far he hath answered what he had prepared the reader to expect, *cleurness* and *precision*, in his way of treating these *curious and sublime subjects*. He had particularly proposed, with regard to power, force, and energy, "to fix, if possible, the precise meaning of these terms; and thereby remove part of that obscurity which is so much complained of in this species of philosophy."‡

What Mr. Hume hath offered, concerning cause and effect, puts me in mind of a remarkable passage in lord Bolingbroke's posthumous works, which I shall mention on this occasion. "Whatever knowledge," saith his lordship, "we acquire of apparent causes, we can acquire none of real causality, or that power, that virtue, whatever it be, by which one being acts on another, and becomes a cause. We may call this by different names, according to the different effects of it; but to know it in its first principles, to know the nature of it, would be to know as God himself knows; and therefore this will be always unknown to us, in causes that seem to be most under our inspection, as well as in others that are the most remote from it." And he represents those "philosophers as ridiculous, who, when they have discovered a real actual cause, in its

* Philosophical Essays, p. 157, 158.

† Ibid., p. 162.

‡ Ibid., p. 101, 102.

effects, by the phænomena, reject it, because they cannot conceive its causality, nor assign a sufficient reason why and how it is."* This may seem to bear hard upon Mr. Hume; but what is more to be wondered at, he hath in effect passed a censure upon himself. He indeed gives a high encomium on sceptical philosophy, in the beginning of his sixth Essay; that "every passion is mortified by it, but the love of truth; and that passion never is, nor can be carried to too high a degree. It is surprising therefore, that this philosophy, which, in almost every instance, must be harmless and innocent, should be the subject of so much groundless reproach and obloquy."† But afterwards, in his twelfth Essay, which is of the academical or sceptical philosophy, he gives no advantageous notion of scepticism. He says, that "the grand scope of all the inquiries and disputes of the sceptics is, to destroy reason by ratiocination and argument."‡ And, speaking of the sceptical objections against the relation of cause and effect, he saith, that "while the sceptic insists upon these topics, he seems, for the time at least, to destroy all assurance and conviction;" and then he adds, that "these arguments might be displayed at a greater length, if any durable good or benefit to society could ever be expected to result from them. For," saith he, "here is the chief, and most confounding objection to excessive scepticism, that no durable good can ever be expected from it, while it remains in its full force and vigour."§ And he had said, that "nature will always maintain her rights, and prevail in the end, over any abstract reasoning whatsoever;"|| and if so, I think we may justly conclude, that any abstract reasoning which is contrary to the plain voice of nature ought to be rejected as false and trifling, and of no real use or service to mankind.

But it were well, if the worst thing that could be said of our author's excessive scepticism were, that it is trifling and useless. It will soon appear, that, as he hath managed it, it is of a pernicious tendency; but you will probably be of opinion, that enough hath been said of this gentleman, and his oddities, for the present.

I am, &c.

* Lord Bolingbroke's Works, vol. iii. p. 541.

† Philosophical Essays, p. 70.

‡ Philosophical Essays, p. 245.

§ Ibid., p. 251.

|| Ibid., p. 71.

LETTER XVII.

Observations on Mr. Hume's Essay concerning a particular Providence and a future State—His Attempt to shew, that we cannot justly argue from the Course of Nature to a particular intelligent Cause, because the subject lies entirely beyond the Reach of human Experience, and because God is a singular Cause, and the Universe a singular Effect; and therefore we cannot argue by a Comparison with any other Cause, or any other Effect—His Argument examined, whereby he pretends to prove, that, since we know God only by the Effects in the Works of Nature, we can judge of his Proceedings no farther than we can now see of them, and therefore cannot infer any Rewards or Punishments beyond what are already known by Experience or Observation—The Usefulness of believing future Retributions acknowledged by Mr. Hume, and that the contrary Doctrine is inconsistent with good Policy.

SIR,

IT appears from what was observed in my former letter, that few writers have carried scepticism in philosophy to a greater height than Mr. Hume. I now proceed to consider those things in his writings that seem to be more directly and immediately designed against religion. Some part of what he calls his *Philosophical Essays concerning Human Understanding*, manifestly tends to subvert the very foundations of natural religion, or its most important principles. Another part of them is particularly levelled against the proofs and evidences of the Christian revelation.

The former is what I shall first consider, and shall therefore examine the eleventh of those essays, the title of which is *concerning a particular Providence and a future state*. Mr. Hume introduces what he offers in this essay as sceptical paradoxes advanced by a friend, and pretends by no means to approve of them. He proposes some objections as from himself, to his friend's way of arguing, but takes care to do it in such a manner as to give his friend a superiority in the argument; and some of the worst parts of his essay are directly proposed in his own person. The essay may be considered as consisting of two parts. The one seems to be designed against the existence of God, or of one supreme intelligent cause of the universe; the other, which appears to be the main intention of the essay, is particularly levelled against the doctrine of a future state of rewards and punishments.

I shall begin with the former, because it comes first in order to be considered, though it is not particularly mentioned till towards the conclusion of the essay. He observes, in the person of his Epicurean friend, that "while we argue from the course of nature, and infer a particular intelligent cause, which at first bestowed and still preserves order in the universe, we embrace a principle which is both uncertain and useless." The reason he gives why it is uncertain is, "because the subject lies entirely beyond the reach of human

experience.”* This is a specimen of the use our author would make of the principles he had laid down in the preceding essays. He had represented experience as the only foundation of our knowledge with respect to matter of fact, and the existence of objects: that it is by experience alone that we know the relation of cause and effect: and he had also asserted, that not so much as a probable argument can be drawn from experience to lay a foundation for our reasoning from cause to effect, or from effect to cause. I shall not add any thing here to what was offered in my former letter to show the absurdity, the confusion, and inconsistency of these principles. I shall only observe, that this very writer, who had represented all arguments drawn from experience, with relation to cause and effect, as absolutely uncertain, yet makes it an objection against the argument from the course of nature to an intelligent cause, that *the subject lies entirely beyond the reach of human experience*. What the meaning of this is, it is not easy to apprehend. It will be readily allowed, that we do not know by experience the whole course of nature; yet enough of it falls within the reach even of human observation and experience, to lay a reasonable foundation for inferring from it a supreme intelligent cause. In that part of the universe which cometh under our notice and observation, we may behold such illustrious characters of wisdom, power, and goodness, as determine us, by the most natural way of reasoning in the world, to acknowledge a most wise, and powerful, and benign Author and Cause of the Universe. The inference is not beyond the reach of our faculties, but is one of the most obvious that offereth to the human mind. But perhaps what the author intends by observing, that *this subject lies entirely beyond the reach of human experience*, is this: that notwithstanding the admirable marks of wisdom and design which we behold in the course of nature and order of things, we cannot argue from thence to prove a wise and intelligent Cause of the universe, or that there was any wisdom employed in the formation of it, because neither we, nor any of the human race, were present at the making of it, or saw how it was made. This must be owned to be a very extraordinary way of reasoning, and I believe you will easily excuse me if I do not attempt a confutation of it.

Mr. Hume, after having argued thus in the person of his Epicurean friend, comes in the conclusion of this essay to propose another argument as for himself. “I much doubt,” saith he, “whether it be possible for a cause to be known only by its effect, or to be of so singular and particular a nature as to have no parallel, and no similarity with any other cause or object that has ever fallen under our observation. It is only when two species of objects are found to be constantly conjoined, that we can infer the one from the other: and were an effect presented which was entirely singular, and could not be comprehended under any known species, I do not see that we could form any conjecture or inference at all concerning its

* Philosophical Essays, p. 224.

cause. If experience, and observation, and analogy, be indeed the only guides we can reasonably follow in inferences of this nature, both the effect and cause must bear a similarity and resemblance to other effects and causes which we know, and which we have found in many instances to be conjoined with each other.* Mr. Hume leaves it to his friend's reflections to *prosecute the consequences of this principle*, which, he had hinted before, might lead into *reasonings of too nice and delicate a nature* to be insisted on. The argument, as he hath managed it, is indeed sufficiently obscure and perplexed; but the general intention of it seems to be this; that all our arguings from cause to effect, or from effect to cause, proceed upon analogy, or the comparing similar causes with similar effects. Where therefore there is supposed to be a singular cause, to which there is no parallel (though he much doubts whether there can be a cause of so singular a nature), and a singular effect, there can be no arguing from the one to the other; because in that case we cannot argue by a comparison with any other cause, or any other effect. Except, therefore, we can find another world to compare this with, and an intelligent cause of that world, we cannot argue from the effects in this present world to an intelligent cause: i. e. we cannot be sure there is one God, except we can prove there is one other God at least; or that this world was formed and produced by a wise intelligent cause, unless we know of another world like this, which was also formed by a wise intelligent cause, and perhaps not then neither: for he seems to insist upon it that there should be *many instances* of such causes and effects being *conjoined with each other*, in order to lay a proper foundation for *observation, experience, and analogy, the only guides we can reasonably follow in inferences of this nature*. He immediately after observes, that "according to the antagonists of Epicurus, the universe, an effect quite singular and unparalleled, is always supposed to be the proof of a deity, a cause no less singular and unparalleled." If, by calling the universe a singular and unparalleled effect, he intends to signify that no other universe has come under our observation, it is very true; but it by no means follows that we cannot argue from the evident marks of wisdom and design which we may observe in this universe that we do know, because we do not know any thing of any other universe. This grand universal system, and even that small part of it that we are more particularly acquainted with, comprehendeth such an amazing variety of phænomena, all which exhibit the most incontestable proofs of admirable wisdom, power, and diffusive goodness, that one would think it scarce possible for a reasonable mind to resist the evidence. But such is this subtle metaphysical gentleman's way of arguing in a matter of the highest consequence, the absurdity of which is obvious to any man of plain understanding. It is of a piece with what he had advanced before, that there is no such thing as cause or effect at all, nor can any probable inference be drawn from the one to the other; than which, as hath been already shown, nothing

* Philosophical Essays, p. 232, 233.

can be more inconsistent with common sense, and the reason of all mankind.

The other thing observable in this essay, and which seems to be the principal intention of it, relateth to the proof of a providence and a future state. He introduces his friend as putting himself in the place of Epicurus, and making an harangue to the people of Athens, to prove that the principles of his philosophy were as innocent and salutary as those of any other philosophers. The course of his reasoning or declamation is this: that "the chief or sole argument brought by philosophers for a Divine existence is derived from the order of nature; where there appear such marks of intelligence and design, that they think it extravagant to assign for its cause, either chance, or the blind unguided force of matter: that this is an argument drawn from effects to causes; and that when we infer any particular cause from an effect, we must proportion the one to the other, and can never be allowed to ascribe to the cause any qualities, but what are exactly sufficient to produce the effect; and if we ascribe to it farther qualities, or affirm it capable of producing any other effect, we only indulge the license of conjecture, without reason or authority."* That therefore "allowing God to be the author of the existence or order of the universe, it follows, that he possesses that precise degree of power, intelligence, and benevolence, which appears in his workmanship, but nothing farther can ever be proved.† Those therefore are vain reasoners, and reverse the order of nature, who instead of regarding this present life, and the present scene of things, as the sole object of their contemplation, render it a passage to something farther. The Divinity may indeed possibly possess attributes which we have never seen exerted, and may be governed by principles of action, which we cannot discover to be satisfied: but we can never have reason to infer any attributes, or any principles of action in him, but so far as we know them to be exerted or satisfied." He asks, "Are there any marks of distributive justice in the world?" And if it be said, that "the justice of God exerts itself in part, but not in its full extent," he answers, "that we have no reason to give it any particular extent, but only so far as we see it at present exert itself."‡ That "indeed when we find that any work has proceeded from the skill and industry of man, who is a being whom we know by experience, and whose nature we are acquainted with, we can draw a hundred inferences concerning what may be expected from him, and these inferences will all be founded on experience and observation. But since the Deity is known to us only by his productions, and as a single being in the universe, not comprehended under any species or genus, from whose experienced attributes or qualities we can by analogy infer any attribute or quality in him, we can only infer such attributes or perfections, and such a degree of those attributes, as is precisely adapted to the effect we examine; but farther attributes or farther degrees of those attributes, we can never be authorized to

* Philosophical Essays, p. 215.

† Ibid. p. 220.

‡ Ibid. p. 203.

infer or suppose by any rules of just reasoning." He adds, that "the great source of our mistakes on this subject is this: we tacitly consider ourselves as in the place of the Supreme Being, and conclude that he will on every occasion observe the same conduct, which we ourselves in his situation would have embraced as reasonable and eligible; whereas it must evidently appear contrary to all rules of analogy to reason from the intentions and projects of men to those of a Being so different, and so much superior—so remote and incomprehensible, who bears less analogy to any other being in the universe than the sun to a waxen taper." He concludes, therefore, "that no new fact can ever be inferred from the religious hypothesis: no reward or punishment expected or dreaded beyond what is already known by practice and observation."* This is a faithful extract of the argument in this essay, drawn together as closely as I could, without the repetitions with which it abounded.

I shall now make a few remarks upon it.

The whole of his reasoning depends upon this maxim, that when once we have traced an effect up to its cause, we can never ascribe any thing to the cause but what is precisely proportioned to the effect, and what we ourselves discern to be so; nor can we infer any thing farther concerning the cause, than what the effect, or the present appearance of it, necessarily leads to. He had to the same purpose observed, in a former essay, that "it is allowed by all philosophers, that the effect is the measure of the power."† But this is far from being universally true; for we, in many instances, clearly perceive that a cause can produce an effect which it doth not actually produce, or a greater effect than it hath actually produced. This gentleman's whole reasoning proceeds upon confounding necessary and free causes; and indeed he seems not willing to allow any distinction between them, or that there are any other but necessary and material causes.‡ A necessary cause acts up to the utmost of its power, and therefore the effect must be exactly proportioned to it. But the case is manifestly different as to free and voluntary causes. They may have a power of producing effects which they do not actually produce; and, as they act from discernment and choice, we may, in many cases, reasonably ascribe to them farther views than what we discern or discover in their present course of action. This author himself owns, that this may be reasonably done with respect to man, whom we know by experience, and whose nature and conduct we are acquainted with; but denies that the same way of arguing will hold with respect to the Deity. But surely, when once we come from the consideration of his works to the knowledge of a self-existent and absolutely perfect Being, we may, from the nature of that self-existent and absolutely perfect cause, reasonably conclude, that he is able to produce certain effects beyond what actually come under our present notice and observation, and indeed that he can do whatsoever doth not imply a contradiction. This universe is a vast, a glorious, and amazing system, comprehending an infinite variety of parts; and it is but a small part

* *Philosophical Essays*, p. 230. † *Ibid.* p. 125. ‡ *Ibid.* p. 131, 132, 141, 151.

of it that comes under our more immediate notice. But we know enough to be convinced, that it demonstrateth a wisdom as well as power beyond all imagination great and wonderful: and we may justly conclude the same concerning those parts of the universe that we are not acquainted with. And for any man to say, that we cannot reasonably ascribe any degree of wisdom or power to God, but what is exactly proportioned to that part of the universal frame which comes under our own particular observation, is a very strange way of arguing! The proofs of the wisdom and the power of God, as appearing in our part of the system, are so striking, that it is hard to conceive how any man, that is not under the influence of the most obstinate prejudice, can refuse to submit to their force: and yet there are many phenomena, the reasons and ends of which we are not at present able to assign. The proper conduct in such a case is, to believe there are most wise reasons for these things, though we do not now discern those reasons, and to argue from the uncontested characters of wisdom in things that we do know, that this most wise and powerful agent, the author of nature, hath also acted with admirable wisdom in those things, the designs and ends of which we do not know. It would be wrong therefore to confine the measures of his wisdom precisely to what appeareth to our narrow apprehensions, in that part of his works which falleth under our immediate inspection. This was the great fault of the Epicureans, and other atheistical philosophers, who, judging by their own narrow views, urged several things as proofs of the want of wisdom and contrivance, which, upon a fuller knowledge of the works of nature, furnish farther convincing proofs of the wisdom of the great Former of all things.

In like manner, with respect to his goodness, there are numberless things in this present constitution, which lead us to regard him as a most benign and benevolent Being. And therefore it is highly reasonable that, when we meet with any phenomena which we cannot reconcile with our ideas of the divine goodness, we should conclude that it is only for want of having the whole of things before us, and considering them in their connexion and harmony, that they appear to us with a disorderly aspect. And it is very just in such a case to make use of any reasonable hypothesis, which tendeth to set the goodness of God in a fair and consistent light.

The same way of reasoning holds with regard to the justice and righteousness of God as the great Governor of the world. We may reasonably conclude, from the intimate sense we have of the excellency of such a character, and the great evil and deformity of injustice and unrighteousness, which sense is implanted in us by the author of our being, and from the natural rewards of virtue, and punishment of vice, even in the present constitution of things, that he is a lover of righteousness and virtue, and an enemy to vice and wickedness. Our author himself makes his Epicurean friend acknowledge that, in the present order of things, virtue is attended with more peace of mind and with many other advantages above vice ;*

* Philosophical Essays, p. 221.

and yet it cannot be denied that there are many instances obvious to common observation, in which vice seemeth to flourish and prosper, and virtue to be exposed to great evils and calamities. What is to be concluded from this? Is it that because the justice of God here showeth itself only *in part*, and not *in its full extent* (to use our author's expression), therefore righteousness in God is imperfect in its degree, and that he doth not possess it in the full extent of that perfection, nor will ever exert it any farther than we see him exert it in this present state? This were an unreasonable conclusion, concerning a being of such admirable perfection, whose righteousness as well as wisdom must be supposed to be infinitely superior to ours. It is natural, therefore, to think that this present life is only a part of the divine scheme, which shall be completed in a future state.

But he urgeth, that the great source of our mistakes on this subject is, that "we tacitly consider ourselves as in the place of the Supreme Being, and conclude that he will on every occasion observe the same conduct which we ourselves in his situation would have embraced as reasonable and eligible. Whereas it must evidently appear contrary to all rules of analogy, to reason from the intentions and purposes of men to those of a Being so different and so much superior, so remote and incomprehensible."* But though it were the highest absurdity to pretend to tie down the infinite incomprehensible Being to our scanty model and measures of acting, and to assume he will *on every occasion* (for so our author is pleased to put the case) observe the same conduct that we should judge eligible; since there may be innumerable things concerning which we are unable to form any proper judgment, for want of having the same comprehensive view of things that he hath; yet on the other hand, there are some cases so manifest, that we may safely pronounce concerning them, as worthy or unworthy of the divine perfections. And as our own natures are the work of God, we may reasonably argue from the traces of excellencies in ourselves to the infinitely superior perfections in the great Author of the universe, still taking care to remove all those limitations and defects with which those qualities are attended in us. This is what Mr. Hume himself elsewhere allows in his *Essay on the Origin of our Ideas*. "The idea of God," saith he, "as meaning an infinitely intelligent, wise, and good being, arises from reflecting on the operations of our own minds, and augmenting those qualities of goodness and wisdom without bound or limit." See his *Philosophical Essays*, p. 24, 25. Since therefore we cannot possibly help regarding goodness and benevolence, justice and righteousness, as necessary ingredients in a worthy and excellent character, and as among the noblest excellencies of an intellectual being, we are unavoidably led to conclude that they are to be found in the highest possible degree of eminency in the absolutely perfect Being, the Author and Governor of the world. These are not mere arbitrary

* *Philosophical Essays*, p. 230.

suppositions, but are evidently founded in nature and reason ; and though in many particular instances we, through the narrowness of our views, cannot be proper judges of the grounds and reasons of the divine administration, yet in general we have reason to conclude, that if there be such a thing as goodness and righteousness in God, or any perfection in him correspondent to what is called goodness and righteousness in us, he will order it so that in the final issue of things a remarkable difference shall be made between the righteous and the wicked ; that at one time or other, and taking in the whole of existence, virtue, though now for a time it may be greatly afflicted and oppressed, shall meet with its due reward ; and vice and wickedness, though now it may seem to prosper and triumph, shall receive its proper punishment. Since therefore, by the observation of all ages, it hath often happened, that in the present course of human affairs, good and excellent persons have been unhappy, and exposed to many evils and sufferings, and bad and vicious men have been in very prosperous circumstances, and have had a large affluence of all worldly enjoyments, even to the ends of their lives, and that, as this gentleman himself elsewhere expresseth it, "such is the confusion and disorder of human affairs, that no perfect economy or regular distribution of happiness or misery is in this life ever to be expected ;"* it seems reasonable to conclude, that there shall be a future state of existence, in which these apparent irregularities shall be set right, and there shall be a more perfect distribution of rewards and punishments to men according to their moral conduct. There is nothing in this way of arguing but what is conformable to the soundest principles of reason, and to the natural feelings of the human heart. But though a future state of retributions in general be probable, yet as many doubts might still be apt to rise in our minds concerning it, an express revelation from God, assuring us of it in his name, and more distinctly pointing out the nature and certainty of those retributions, would be of the most signal advantage.

I shall have occasion to resume this subject, when I come to consider what Lord Bolingbroke hath more largely offered in relation to it. At present it is proper to observe that though Mr. Hume seems to allow his epicurean friend's reasoning to be just, yet he owns, that "in fact men do not reason after that manner ;" and that "they draw many consequences from the belief of a divine existence, and suppose that the deity will inflict punishments on vice, and bestow rewards on virtue, beyond what appears in the ordinary course of nature. Whether this reasoning of theirs," adds he, "be just or not, is no matter ; its influence on their life and conduct must still be the same. And those who attempt to disabuse them of such prejudices, may, for aught I know, be good reasoners, but I cannot allow them to be good citizens and politicians ; since they free men from one restraint upon their passions, and make the infringement of the laws of

* Moral and Political Essays, p. 224, 225.

and yet it cannot be denied that there are many instances obvious to common observation, in which vice seemeth to flourish and prosper, and virtue to be exposed to great evils and calamities. What is to be concluded from this? Is it that because the justice of God here sheweth itself only *in part*, and not *in its full extent* (to use our author's expression), therefore righteousness in God is imperfect in its degree, and that he doth not possess it in the full extent of that perfection, nor will ever exert it any farther than we see him exert it in this present state? This were an unreasonable conclusion, concerning a being of such admirable perfection, whose righteousness as well as wisdom must be supposed to be infinitely superior to ours. It is natural, therefore, to think that this present life is only a part of the divine scheme, which shall be completed in a future state.

But he urgeth, that the great source of our mistakes on this subject is, that "we tacitly consider ourselves as in the place of the Supreme Being, and conclude that he will on every occasion observe the same conduct which we ourselves in his situation would have embraced as reasonable and eligible. Whereas it must evidently appear contrary to all rules of analogy, to reason from the intentions and purposes of men to those of a Being so different and so much superior, so remote and incomprehensible."* But though it were the highest absurdity to pretend to tie down the infinite incomprehensible Being to our scanty model and measures of acting, and to assume he will *on every occasion* (for so our author is pleased to put the case) observe the same conduct that we should judge eligible; since there may be innumerable things concerning which we are unable to form any proper judgment, for want of having the same comprehensive view of things that he hath; yet on the other hand, there are some cases so manifest, that we may safely pronounce concerning them, as worthy or unworthy of the divine perfections. And as our own natures are the work of God, we may reasonably argue from the traces of excellencies in ourselves to the infinitely superior perfections in the great Author of the universe, still taking care to remove all those limitations and defects with which those qualities are attended in us. This is what Mr. Hume himself elsewhere allows in his *Essay on the Origin of our Ideas*. "The idea of God," saith he, "as meaning an infinitely intelligent, wise, and good being, arises from reflecting on the operations of our own minds, and augmenting those qualities of goodness and wisdom without bound or limit." See his *Philosophical Essays*, p. 24, 25. Since therefore we cannot possibly help regarding goodness and benevolence, justice and righteousness, as necessary ingredients in a worthy and excellent character, and as among the noblest excellencies of an intellectual being, we are unavoidably led to conclude that they are to be found in the highest possible degree of eminency in the absolutely perfect Being, the Author and Governor of the world. These are not mere arbitrary

* *Philosophical Essays*, p. 230.

suppositions, but are evidently founded in nature and reason ; and though in many particular instances we, through the narrowness of our views, cannot be proper judges of the grounds and reasons of the divine administration, yet in general we have reason to conclude, that if there be such a thing as goodness and righteousness in God, or any perfection in him correspondent to what is called goodness and righteousness in us, he will order it so that in the final issue of things a remarkable difference shall be made between the righteous and the wicked ; that at one time or other, and taking in the whole of existence, virtue, though now for a time it may be greatly afflicted and oppressed, shall meet with its due reward ; and vice and wickedness, though now it may seem to prosper and triumph, shall receive its proper punishment. Since therefore, by the observation of all ages, it hath often happened, that in the present course of human affairs, good and excellent persons have been unhappy, and exposed to many evils and sufferings, and bad and vicious men have been in very prosperous circumstances, and have had a large affluence of all worldly enjoyments, even to the ends of their lives, and that, as this gentleman himself elsewhere expresses it, "such is the confusion and disorder of human affairs, that no perfect economy or regular distribution of happiness or misery is in this life ever to be expected ;"* it seems reasonable to conclude, that there shall be a future state of existence, in which these apparent irregularities shall be set right, and there shall be a more perfect distribution of rewards and punishments to men according to their moral conduct. There is nothing in this way of arguing but what is conformable to the soundest principles of reason, and to the natural feelings of the human heart. But though a future state of retributions in general be probable, yet as many doubts might still be apt to rise in our minds concerning it, an express revelation from God, assuring us of it in his name, and more distinctly pointing out the nature and certainty of those retributions, would be of the most signal advantage.

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* Moral and Political Essays, p. 224, 225.

equity and society in one respect more easy and secure.”* I think it follows from this by his own account, that he did not act a wise or good part, the part of a friend to the public or to mankind, in publishing this Essay, the manifest design of which is to persuade men, that there is no just foundation in reason for expecting a future state of rewards and punishments at all. Nor is the concession he here makes very favourable to what he addeth in the next page, concerning the universal liberty to be allowed by the state to all kinds of philosophy. According to his own way of representing it, Epicurus must have been cast, if he had pleaded his cause before the people; and the principal design of this Essay, which seems to be to show not only the reasonableness, but harmlessness, of that philosophy, is lost; for if the spreading of those principles and reasonings is contrary to the rules of good policy, and the character of good citizens; if they have a tendency to free men from a strong *restraint upon their passions*, and to make the *infringement of the laws of equity and society more easy and secure*; then such principles and reasonings, according to his way of representing the matter, ought in good policy to be restrained, as having a bad influence on the community.

There is one passage more in this Essay which may deserve some notice. It is in page 230, where he observes, that “God discovers himself by some faint traces or outlines, beyond which we have no authority to ascribe to him any attribute or perfection. What we imagine to be a superior perfection may really be a defect. Or, were it ever so much a perfection, the ascribing it to the Supreme Being, where it appears not to have been really exerted to the full in his works, savours more of flattery and panegyric, than of just reasoning and sound philosophy.” The course of his arguing seems to be this: That it would savour of *flattery*, not of *sound reasoning*, to ascribe any attribute or perfection to God, which *appears not to have been exerted to the full in his works*. And he had observed before, that “it is impossible for us to know any thing of the cause, but what we have antecedently, not inferred, but *discovered to the full* in the effect.”† It is plain therefore, that according to him we ought not to ascribe any perfection to God, but what is not merely *inferred*, but *discovered to the full* in his works. It is also manifest, that according to him there is no attribute or perfection of the Deity exerted or discovered to the full in his works; for he had said just before, that he *discovers himself only by some faint traces or outlines*. The natural conclusion from these premises taken together is plainly this: that it would be flattery and presumption in us to ascribe any attribute or perfection to God at all. And now I leave it to you to judge of the obligations the world is under to this writer. In one part of his Essay he makes an attempt to subvert the proof of the existence of a God, or a supreme intelligent cause of the universe; and here he insinuates that it would be wrong to ascribe any perfection or attribute to him at all. And the main

* Philosophical Essays, p. 231.

† Ibid., p. 222.

design of the whole Essay is to show, than no argument can be drawn from any of his perfections, to make it probable that there shall be rewards and punishments in a future state, though he acknowledgeth that it is of great advantage to mankind to believe them.

You will not wonder after this, that this gentleman, who has endeavoured to shake the foundations of natural religion, should use his utmost efforts to subvert the evidences of the Christian revelation. What he hath offered this way will be the subject of some future letters.

LETTER XVIII.

An Examination of Mr. Hume's Essay on Miracles—A Summary of the first Part of that Essay, which is designed to show, that Miracles are incapable of being proved by any Testimony or Evidence whatsoever—His main Principle examined, that Experience is our only Guide in reasoning concerning Matters of Fact; and that Miracles being contrary to the established Laws of Nature, there is an uniform Experience against the Existence of any Miracle—It is shown that no Argument can be drawn from Experience, to prove that Miracles are impossible, or that they have not been actually wrought—Miracles not above the Power of God, nor unworthy of his Wisdom—Valuable Ends may be assigned for Miracles—They are capable of being proved by proper Testimony—This applied to the Resurrection of Christ—And it is shown, that the evidence set before us in Scripture is every way sufficient to satisfy us of the truth of it, supposing that Evidence to have been really given as there represented.

SIR,

I NOW proceed to consider Mr. Hume's celebrated *Essay on Miracles*, which is the tenth of his *Philosophical Essays*, and has been mightily admired and extolled, as a masterly and unanswerable piece. I think no impartial man will say so, that has read the ingenious and judicious answer made to it by the Rev. Mr. Adams, now rector of Shrewsbury. It is entitled, *An Essay in answer to Mr. Hume's Essay on Miracles, by William Adams, M. A.* That which I have by me is the second edition, with additions, London, 1754. Besides this, I have seen a short but excellent discourse, by the Rev. Dr. Rutherford, entitled, *The Credibility of Miracles defended against the Author of the Philosophical Essays*, "in a discourse delivered at the primary visitation of the Right Rev. Thomas Lord Bishop of Ely.—Cambridge, 1751." These in my opinion are sufficient. But since you desire that I would also take a particular notice of Mr. Hume's Essay, I shall obey your commands, and enter on a distinct consideration of this boasted performance.

Mr. Hume introduceth his *Essay on Miracles* in a very pompous manner, as might be expected from one who sets up in his Philo-

sophical Essays, for teaching men better methods of reasoning than any philosopher had done before him. He had taken care at every turn to let his readers know how much they are obliged to him, for throwing new light on the most *curious* and *sublime effects*, with regard to which the most celebrated philosophers had been *extremely defective* in their researches. And now he begins his *Essay on Miracles* with declaring, that "he flatters himself that he has discovered an argument, which, if just, will, with the wise and learned, be an everlasting check to all kinds of superstitious delusion ; and, consequently, will be useful as long as the world endures ; for so long," he presumes, "will the account of miracles and prodigies be found in all profane history."*

This Essay consisteth of two parts. The first, which reacheth from p. 173 to p. 186, is designed to show, that no evidence which can be given, however seemingly full and strong, can be a sufficient ground for believing the truth and existence of miracles ; or, in other words, that miracles are, in the nature of things, incapable of being proved by any evidence or testimony whatsoever. The second part is intended to show, that supposing a miracle capable of being proved by full and sufficient evidence or testimony, yet, in fact, there never was a *miraculous event in any history* established upon such evidence. The first is what he seems principally to rely upon ; and, indeed, if this can be proved, it will make any particular inquiry into the testimony produced for miracles needless.

The method he makes use of in the first part of his Essay, to show that no evidence or testimony that can be given is a sufficient ground for a reasonable assent to the truth and existence of miracles, is this : He lays it down as an undoubted principle, that experience is our only guide in reasoning concerning matters of fact ; and at the same time insinuates, that this guide is far from being infallible, and is apt to lead us into errors and mistakes. He observes, that the validity and credibility of human testimony is wholly founded upon experience : That in judging how far a testimony is to be depended upon, we balance the opposite circumstances, which may create any doubt or uncertainty : That the evidence arising from testimony may be destroyed, either by the contrariety and opposition of the testimony, or by the consideration of the nature of the facts themselves : That when the facts partake of the *marvellous* and *extraordinary*, there are two opposite experiences with regard to them ; and that which is the most credible is to be preferred, though still with a diminution of its credibility, in proportion to the force of the other which is opposed to it : That this holdeth still more strongly in the case of miracles, which are supposed to be contrary to the laws of nature ; for experience being our only guide, and an uniform experience having established those laws, there must be an uniform experience against the existence of any miracle ; and an uniform experience amounts to a full and entire proof. To suppose, therefore, any testimony to be a proof of a

* Philosophical Essays, p. 174.

miracle, is to suppose one full proof for a miracle, opposed to another full proof in the nature of the thing against it, in which case those proofs destroy one another. Finally, that we are not to believe any testimony concerning a miracle, except the falsehood of that testimony should be more miraculous than the miracle itself which it is designed to establish. He also gives a hint, that as it is impossible for us to know the attributes or actions of God, otherwise than from the experience which we have of his productions, we cannot be sure that he can effect miracles, which are contrary to all our experience, and the established course of nature; and therefore miracles are impossible to be proved by any evidence.

Having given this general idea of this first part of Mr. Hume's Essay on Miracles, I shall now proceed to a more particular examination of it.

It is manifest that the main principle, which lieth at the foundation of his whole scheme, is this: that experience is our only "guide in reasoning concerning matters of fact."* You will have observed, from what hath been remarked in my former letters, that this author brings up the word *experience* upon all occasions. It is, as he hath managed it, a kind of cant term, proposed in a loose, indeterminate way, so that it is not easy to form a clear idea of it, or of what this writer precisely intends by it. He had declared, that it is only by experience that we come to know the existence of objects; that it is only by experience that we know the relation between cause and effect; and at the same time had endeavoured to show, that experience cannot furnish so much as even a probable argument concerning any connexion betwixt cause and effect, or by which we can draw any conclusion from the one to the other. He had afterwards applied the same term, experience, to show that no argument can be brought to prove the existence of one supreme intelligent Cause of the universe, because this is *a subject that lies entirely beyond the reach of human experience*; and that we can have no proof of a future state of retributions, because we know no more concerning providence than what we learn from experience in this present state. And now he comes to try the force of this formidable word against the existence of miracles, and to raise an argument against them from experience.

But that we may not lose ourselves in the ambiguity of the term as he employs it, let us distinctly examine what sense it bears, as applied to the present question. In judging of the truth of the maxim he hath laid down, viz., that experience is our only guide in reasoning concerning matters of fact, it is to be considered, that the question we are now upon properly relates, not to future *events*, as the author seems sometimes to put it,† but to past matter of fact. What are we, therefore, to understand by that experience, which he makes to be our only guide in reasoning concerning them? Is it our own particular personal experience, or is it the experience of others, as well as our own? And if of others, is it the experience

* Philosophical Essays, p. 174.

† Ibid. p. 175.

of some others only, or of all mankind? If it be understood thus, that every man's own personal observation and experience is to be his only guide in reasoning concerning matters of fact, so that no man is to believe anything with relation to any facts whatsoever, but what is agreeable to what he hath himself observed or known in the course of his own particular experience; this would be very absurd, and would reduce each man's knowledge of facts into a very narrow compass; it would destroy the use and credit of history, and of a great part of experimental philosophy, and bring us into a state of general ignorance and barbarism. Or is the word *experience* to be taken in a larger and more extensive sense, as comprehending, not merely any particular man's experience, but that of others too? In this case we have no way of knowing experience, but by testimony. And here the question recurs, Is it to be understood of the experience of all mankind, or of some persons only? If the experience referred to be the experience or observation of some persons only, or of a part of mankind, how can this be depended on as a certain guide? For why should their experience be the guide, exclusively of that of others? and how do we know, but that many facts may be agreeable to the experience of others, which are not to theirs? But if the experience referred to be the experience of all mankind in general, that must take in the experience both of all men of the present age, and of those in past times and ages, it must be acknowledged that this rule and criterion is not easily applicable; for will any man say, that we are to believe no facts but what are agreeable to the experience of mankind in all ages? Are we, in order to this, to take in whatsoever any man or men, in any age or country, have had experience of? and to judge by this how far it is reasonable to believe any past fact or facts, of which we ourselves have not had sensible evidence? Even on this view of the case, it might probably take in many facts of a very extraordinary nature, and which have happened out of the common course of things; of which there have been instances in the experience and observation of different nations and ages. And at this rate experience will not be inconsistent with the belief even of miracles themselves, of which there have been several instances recorded in the history of mankind.

But farther, in reasoning from experience, either our own or that of others, concerning matters of fact, it is to be considered, what it is that we propose to judge or determine by experience in relation to them. Is it whether these facts are possible, or whether they are probable, or whether they have been actually done? As to the possibility of facts, experience, indeed, or the observation of similar events known to ourselves or others, may assure us that facts or events are possible, but not that the contrary is impossible. Concerning this, experience cannot decide anything at all. We cannot conclude any event to be impossible, merely because we have had no experience of the like, or because it is contrary to our own observation and experience, or to the experience of others; for, as this gentleman observes in another part of his *Essays*, "the contrary

of every matter of fact is still possible, because it can never imply a contradiction."* And again he says, speaking of matters of fact, "there are no demonstrative arguments in the case; since it implies no contradiction, that the course of nature may change."† No argument, therefore, can be brought to demonstrate anything or fact to be impossible, merely because it is contrary to the course of our own observation and experience, and that of mankind, provided it doth not imply a contradiction, or provided there be a power capable of effecting it. Another thing to be considered, with regard to facts, is, whether they are probable: And here experience, or the observation of similar events, made by ourselves or others, may be of great use, to assist us in forming a judgment concerning the probability of past facts, or in forming conjectures concerning future ones. But if the question be, Whether an event has actually happened, or a fact has been done; concerning this, experience, taken from an observation of similar events, or the ordinary course of causes and effects, cannot give us any assurance or certainty to proceed upon. We cannot certainly conclude, that any fact or event has been done, merely because we or others have had experience or observation of a fact or event of a like nature; nor, on the other hand, can we conclude that such a certain event hath not happened, or that such a fact hath not been actually done, because we have not had experience of a like action or event being done, or have had experience of the contrary being done. The rule, therefore, which he lays down, of judging which side is supported by the greater number of experiments, and of balancing the opposite experiments, and deducting the lesser number from the greater, in order to know the exact force of the superior evidence,‡ is very uncertain and fallacious, if employed in judging whether matters of fact have been really done; for the fact referred to, and the evidence attending it, may be so circumstanced, that, though it be a fact of a singular nature, and to which many instances of a different kind may be opposed, we may yet have such an assurance of its having been actually done, as may reasonably produce a sufficient conviction in the mind. The proper way of judging whether a fact or event, of which we ourselves have not had sensible evidence, hath been actually done, is by competent testimony. And this, in common language, is distinguished from experience, though this writer artfully confounds them.

This, therefore, is what we are next to consider, viz., the force of human testimony, and how far it is to be depended upon.

And with regard to the validity of the evidence arising from human testimony, he observes, that "there is no species of reasoning more common, more useful, and even necessary to human life, than that derived from the testimony of men, and the reports of eye-witnesses and spectators." The whole certainty or assurance arising from testimony he resolveth into what he calls *past experience*. That "it is derived from no other principle than our obser-

* Philosophical Essays, p. 48.

† Ibid. p. 62.

‡ Ibid. p. 176.

vation of the veracity of human testimony, and of the usual conformity of facts to the report of witnesses." And he mentions, as grounds of the belief of human testimony, that "men have commonly an inclination to truth, and a sentiment of probity; that they are sensible to shame when detected in a falsehood; and that these are qualities discovered by experience to be inherent in human nature."* But he might have put the case much more strongly, by observing, that human testimony, by the acknowledgment of all mankind, may be so circumstanced, as to produce an infallible assurance, or an evidence so strong, that, as our author expresseth it in another case, none *but a fool or a madman* would doubt of it. It is a little too loose to say in general, that it is *founded only on past experience*. It hath its foundation in the very nature of things, in the constitution of the world and of mankind, and in the appointment of the Author of our being, who, it is manifest, hath formed and designed us to be in numberless instances determined by this evidence, which often comes with such force, that we cannot refuse our assent to it without the greatest absurdity, and putting a manifest constraint upon our nature.† Mr. Hume himself, in his *Essay on Liberty and Necessity*, hath run a parallel between moral and physical evidence, and hath endeavoured to show that the one is as much to be depended on as the other. He expressly saith, that "when we consider how aptly natural and moral evidence link together, and form only one chain of argument, we shall make no scruple to allow, that they are of the same nature, and derived from the same principles."‡

It will be easily granted, what our author here observes, that "there are a number of circumstances to be taken into consideration in all judgments of this kind; and that we must balance the opposite circumstances that create any doubt or uncertainty; and when we discover a superiority on any side, we incline to it, but still with a diminution of assurance in proportion to the force of its antagonist."§ Among the particulars which may diminish or destroy the force of any argument drawn from human testimony, he mentions the contrariety of the evidence, contradictions of witnesses, their suspicious character, &c.: and then proceeds to take notice of "what may be drawn from the nature of the fact attested, supposing it to partake of the extraordinary and the marvellous." He argueth, that "in that case the evidence resulting from the testimony receives a diminution greater or less in proportion as the fact is more or less unusual. When the fact attested is such a one as has seldom fallen under our observation, here is a contest of two opposite experiences, of which the one destroys the other as far its force goes; and the superior can only operate upon the mind by the force which remains." This is a plausible, but a very fallacious way of reasoning. A thing may be very unusual, and yet, if confirmed by proper testimony, its being unusual may not diminish its credit, or produce in the mind of

* *Philosophical Essays*, p. 176, 177.

† *Ditton on the Resurrection*, part 2.

‡ *Philosophical Essays*, p. 144.

§ *Ibid.* p. 177.

a thinking person a doubt or suspicion concerning it. Indeed, vulgar minds, who judge of every thing by their own narrow notions, and by what they themselves have seen, are often apt to reject and disbelieve a thing, that is not conformable to their own particular customs or experience. But wiser men, and those of more enlarged minds, judge otherwise; and, provided a thing comes to them sufficiently attested and confirmed by good evidence, make its being unusual no objection at all to its credibility. Many uncommon facts, and unusual phænomena of nature, are believed by the most sagacious philosophers, and received as true without hesitation, upon the testimony of persons who were worthy of credit, without following the author's rules, or making their own want of experience or observation an objection against those accounts. And upon this dependeth no small part of our knowledge. Mr. Adams hath very well illustrated this by several instances, and hath justly observed, "that the most uniform experience is sometimes outweighed by a single testimony; because experience in this case is only a negative evidence, and the slightest positive testimony is for the most part an overbalance to the strongest negative evidence that can be produced." *

Our author here very improperly talks of a *contest between two opposite experiences*, the one of which destroys the other. For when I believe a thing unusual, I do not believe a thing opposite to mine own experience, but different from it, or a thing of which I have had no experience; though if it were a thing contrary to my own experience, provided it were confirmed by sufficient testimony, this is not a valid argument against its truth, nor a sufficient reason for disbelieving it. This gentleman himself hath mentioned a remarkable instance of this kind in the Indian prince, who refused to believe the *first relations concerning the effects of frost*. This instance, though he laboureth the point here, and in an additional note at the end of his book, is not at all favourable to his scheme. He acknowledgeth, that in this case of freezing, the event follows *contrary to the rules of analogy, and is such as a RATIONAL INDIAN would not look for*. The constant experience in those countries, according to which the waters are always fluid, and never in a state of hardness and solidity, is against freezing. This, according to his way of reasoning, might be regarded as a *proof* drawn from constant experience, and the uniform course of nature, as far as they knew it. Here then is an instance, in which it is reasonable for men to believe upon good evidence an event no way conformable to their experience, and contrary to the rule of analogy, which he yet seems to make the only rule by which we are to judge of the credibility and truth of facts.

From the consideration of facts that are unusual, he proceeds to those that are miraculous, which is what he hath principally in view; and with regard to these, he endeavoureth to show that no testimony at all is to be admitted. "Let us suppose," saith he, "that the fact

* Adams's Essay in answer to Hume on Miracles, p. 19, 20.

which they affirm, instead of being only marvellous, is really miraculous; and suppose also that the testimony, considered apart, and in itself, amounts to an entire proof; in that case there is proof against proof, of which the strongest must prevail, but still with a diminution of its force in proportion to that of its antagonist.* It may be proper to remark here, that this writer had in a former essay defined a proof to be *such an argument drawn from experience, as leaves no room for doubt or opposition.*† Admitting this definition, it is improper and absurd for him to talk of *proof against proof*; for since a proof, according to his own account of it, leaves no room for doubt or opposition; where there is a proper proof of a fact there cannot be a proper proof at the same time against it; for one truth cannot contradict another truth. No doubt his intention is to signify that there can be no proof given of a miracle at all, and that the proof is only on the other side; for he there adds, "A miracle is a violation of the laws of nature; and as a firm and unalterable experience hath established those laws" [he should have said, hath discovered to us that these are the established laws, i. e., that this is the ordinary course of nature] "the proof against a miracle, from the very nature of the fact, is as entire as any argument from experience can possibly be imagined." He repeats this again afterward, and observes, that there must be an uniform experience against every miraculous event, otherwise the event would not merit the appellation; and as an uniform experience amounts to a proof, there is here a direct and full proof from the nature of the fact, against the existence of any miracle.‡ He seems to have a very high opinion of the force of this way of reasoning, and therefore takes care to put his reader again in mind of it in the latter part of his Essay. "'Tis his experience alone," saith he, "which gives authority to human testimony; and 'tis the same experience that assures us of the laws of nature. When therefore these two kinds of experience are contrary, we have nothing to do but to substract the one from the other. And this substruction with regard to all popular religions amounts to an entire annihilation."§ And it is chiefly upon this that he foundeth the arrogant censure, which, with an unparalleled assurance, he passeth upon all that believe the Christian religion, that "whosoever is moved by faith to assent to it, is conscious of a continued miracle in his own person, which subverts all the principles of his understanding, and gives him a determination to believe whatever is most contrary to custom and experience." It is thus that he concludes his Essay, as if he had for ever silenced all the advocates for Christianity, and they must henceforth either renounce their faith, or submit to pass with men of his superior understanding for persons miraculously stupid, and utterly lost to all reason and common sense.

Let us therefore examine what there is in this argument that can support such a peculiar strain of confidence; and I believe it will

* Philosophical Essays, p. 108.

† Ibid., p. 93.

‡ Ibid., p. 181.

§ Ibid., p. 202, 203.

appear that never was there weaker reasoning set off with so much pomp and parade.

There is one general observation that may be sufficiently obvious to any man, who brings with him common sense and attention, and which is alone sufficient to show the fallacy of this boasted argument; and it is this: that the proof arising from experience, on which he layeth so mighty a stress, amounteth to no more than this, that we learn from it what is conformable to the ordinary course and order of things, but we cannot learn or pronounce from experience that it is impossible things or events should happen in any particular instance contrary to that course. We cannot therefore pronounce such an event, though it be contrary to the usual course of things, to be impossible; in which case no testimony whatsoever could prove it. And if it be possible, there is place for testimony. And this testimony may be so strong and so circumstanced, as to make it reasonable for us to believe it. And if we have sufficient evidence to convince us that such an event hath actually happened, however extraordinary or miraculous, no argument drawn from experience can prove that it hath not happened. I would observe by the way, that when this gentleman talks of an *uniform experience*, and a *firm and unalterable experience*, against the existence of all miracles, if he means by it such an universal experience of all mankind as hath never been counteracted in any single instance, this is plainly supposing the very thing in question, and which he hath no right to suppose, because, by his own acknowledgment, mankind have believed in all ages that miracles have really been wrought. By uniform experience, therefore, in this argument must be understood, the general or ordinary experience of mankind in the usual course of things. And it is so far from being true, as he confidently affirms, that such an uniform experience amounts to a *full* and direct proof, from the nature of the fact, against the existence of any miracle, that it is no proof against it at all. Let us judge of this by his own definition of a miracle. "A miracle," saith he, "may be accurately defined, a transgression of a law of nature by a particular volition of the Deity, or by the interposal of some invisible agent." Now our uniform experience affordeth a full and direct proof, that such or such an event is agreeable to the established laws of nature, or to the usual course of things; but it yieldeth no proof at all, that there cannot in any particular instance happen any event contrary to that usual course of things, or to what we have hitherto experienced; or that such an event may not be brought about by a particular volition of the Deity, as our author expresseth it, for valuable ends worthy of his wisdom and goodness.

He cannot therefore make his argument properly bear, except he can prove that miracles are absolutely impossible. And this is what he sometimes seems willing to attempt. Thus, speaking of some miracles pretended to have been fully attested, he asks, "What have we to oppose to such a cloud of witnesses, but the absolute impossibility, or miraculous nature of the event?"* where he seems

* Philosophical Essays, p. 195.

to make the *miraculous nature* of an event, and the *absolute impossibility* of it, to be the same thing. And he elsewhere makes an attempt to prove, that we have no reason to think that God himself can effect a miracle. He urges, that though the Being to whom the miracle is ascribed, be in this case Almighty, it does not, upon that account, become a whit more probable; since it is impossible for us to know the attributes or acts of a Being, otherwise than from the experience we have of his productions in the usual course of nature.* But when once we conclude, from the effects in the works of nature, that he is Almighty, as this gentleman seems here to grant, we may, from his being Almighty, reasonably infer that he can do many things which we do not know that he hath actually done, and can produce many effects which he hath not actually produced; for an Almighty Being can do any thing that doth not imply a contradiction; and it can never be proved that a miracle, or an event contrary to the usual course of nature, implieth a contradiction. This writer himself expressly acknowledgeth, in a passage I cited before, that "it implies no contradiction, that the course of nature may change;"† and he repeats it again afterwards, that "the course of nature may change."‡ And as to the extraordinariness of any fact, he saith, that "even in the most familiar events, the energy of the cause is as unintelligible, as in the most extraordinary and unusual."§ What we call the course of nature is the appointment of God, and the continuance of it dependeth upon his power and will; it is no more difficult for him to act contrary to it in any particular instance, than to act according to it. The one is in itself as easy to Almighty Power as the other. The true question then is concerning the divine will, whether it can be supposed that God, having established the course of nature, will ever permit or order a deviation from that regular course, which his own wisdom hath established; and with regard to this, it will be readily granted, that it is highly proper and wisely appointed, that in the ordinary state of things, what are commonly called the laws of nature should be maintained, and that things should generally go on in a fixed stated course and order; without which there could be no regular study or knowledge of nature, no use or advantage of experience, either for the acquisition of science, or the conduct of life. But though it is manifestly proper that these laws, or this course of things, should generally take place, it would be an inexcusable presumption to affirm that God, having established these laws and this course of nature in the beginning, hath bound himself never to act otherwise than according to those laws. There may be very good reasons, worthy of his great wisdom, for his acting sometimes contrary to the usual order of things. Nor can it in that case be justly pretended that this would be contrary to the immutability of God, which is Spinoza's great argument against miracles; for those very variations which appear so extraordinary to us, are comprehended within the general plan of his providence, and make a part of his original design.

* Philosophical Essays, p. 95.

† Ibid., p. 62.

‡ Ibid., p. 66.

§ Ibid., p. 114.

The same infinite wisdom which appointed or established those natural laws, did also appoint the deviations from them, or that they should be overruled on some particular occasions; which occasions were also perfectly foreseen from the beginning by his all comprehending mind. If things were always to go on without the least variation in the stated course, men might be apt to overlook or question a most wise governing providence, and to ascribe things (as some have done) to a fixed immutable fate or blind necessity, which they call nature. It may therefore be becoming the wisdom of God to appoint that there should be, on particular occasions, deviations from the usual established course of things. Such extraordinary operations and appearances may tend to awaken in mankind a sense of a Supreme disposer and governor of the world, who is a most wise and free as well as powerful agent, and hath an absolute dominion over nature; and may also answer important ends and purposes of moral government, for displaying God's justice and mercy, but especially for giving attestation to the divine mission of persons, whom he seeth fit to send on extraordinary errands, for instructing and reforming mankind, and for bringing discoveries of the highest importance to direct men to true religion and happiness.

It appeareth then, that no argument can be brought from experience to prove, either that miracles are impossible to the power of God, or that they can never be agreeable to his will; and therefore it is far from yielding a direct and full proof against the existence of miracles. It may illustrate this to consider some of the instances he himself mentions. "Lead cannot of itself remain suspended in the air. Fire consumes wood, and is extinguished by water." Our uniform experience proves, that this is the usual and ordinary course of things, and agreeable to the known laws of nature; it proves, that lead cannot naturally and ordinarily, or by its own force, be suspended in the air; but it affordeth no proof at all, that it cannot be thus suspended in a particular instance by the will of God, or by a supernatural force or power. In like manner our experience proves, that fire consumes wood in the natural course of things; but it yieldeth no proof, that, in a particular instance, the force of fire may not be suspended or overruled, and the wood preserved from being consumed by the interposal of an invisible agent. Another instance he mentions is, that "it is a miracle that a dead man should come to life; because that has never been observed in any age or country;"* but its never having been observed, if that had been the case, would have furnished no proof at all that a dead man cannot be raised to life by the power and will of God, when a most valuable and important end is to be answered by it. And if we have good evidence to convince us, that a man had been really dead, and that that man was afterwards really restored to life, (and this is a matter of fact of which our senses can judge, as well as of any other fact whatsoever) no argument can be drawn from experience to prove that it could not be

* Philosophical Essays, p. 181.

so. Our experience would indeed afford a proof, that no merely natural human power could effect it; or that it is a thing really miraculous, and contrary to the usual course of nature; but it would not amount to a full and direct proof, nor indeed to any proof at all, that it could not be effected by the divine power.

And now we may judge of the propriety of the inference he draws from the argument, as he had managed it. "The plain consequence is," saith he, "and it is a general maxim worthy of our attention, that no testimony is sufficient to establish a miracle, unless the testimony be of such a kind that its falsehood would be more miraculous than the fact which it endeavours to establish; and even in that case, there is a mutual destruction of arguments, and the superiority only gives us an assurance suitable to that degree of force which remains after deducting the inferior. When any one tells me that he saw a dead man restored to life, I immediately consult with myself whether it be more probable that this person should ever deceive or be deceived, or that the fact he relates should really have happened; I weigh the one miracle against the other, and, according to the superiority which I discover, I pronounce my decision, and always reject the greater miracle."*

You cannot but observe here, this writer's jingle upon the word *miracle*. As he had talked of proof against proof, so he here talks as if in the case he is supposing there were miracle against miracle; or as if the question were concerning two extraordinary miraculous facts, the one of which is opposed to the other. But whereas in that case one should think the greater miracle ought to take place against the lesser, this gentleman, with whom miracle and absurdity is the same thing, declares that he always *rejects the greater miracle*. But to quit this poor jingle, it is allowed, that the raising a dead man to life must, if ever it happened, have been a very signal miracle; i. e. as he defines it, a violation of the law of nature by a particular volition of the Deity. The question therefore is, whether any evidence is given which may be depended on, to assure us, that however strange or extraordinary this event may be, yet it hath actually happened. That the thing itself is possible to the Deity, however it may be contrary to the usual course of nature, cannot be reasonably contested; because it cannot be proved to involve a contradiction, or any thing beyond the reach of Almighty power. For it would be to the last degree absurd to say, that he who formed this stupendous system, or who contrived and fabricated the wonderful frame of the human body, and originally gave it a principle of life, could not raise a dead man to life. It would be a contradiction, that the same man should be living and dead at the same time, but not that he who was dead should afterwards be restored to life; and therefore if it be the will of God, and his wisdom and goodness seeth it proper for answering any very important purposes, he is able to effect it. But then, whether he hath actually effected it, is another question; and here it will be readily owned, that in a case of

* Philosophical Essays, p. 182.

so extraordinary a nature, the evidence or testimony upon which we receive it, ought to be very strong and cogent.

Mr. Hume is pleased here to put the case in a very loose and general way. "When any one tells me," saith he, "that he saw a dead man restored to life, I immediately consider with myself, whether it be more probable that this person should either deceive or be deceived, or that the fact he relates should really have happened." He puts it as if there was nothing to depend upon but the testimony of a single person; without any assignable reason for such an extraordinary event; and when thus proposed, naked of all circumstances, no wonder that it hath an odd appearance! But that we may bring the question to a fair issue, let us apply to it what our author without doubt had principally in his view, the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. Taking the case therefore according to the representation given of it in the Holy Scriptures, let us examine whether, supposing all those circumstances to concur which are there exhibited, they do not amount to a full and satisfactory evidence, sufficient to lay a just foundation for a reasonable assent to it. Let us then suppose, that in a series of writings published by different persons in different ages, and all of them incontestably written long before the event happened, a glorious and wonderful person was foretold and described by the most extraordinary characters, who should be sent from heaven to teach and instruct mankind, to guide them in the way of salvation, and to introduce an excellent dispensation of truth and righteousness. That not only the nation and family from which he was to spring, the place of his birth, and time of his appearing, was distinctly pointed out, but it was foretold that he should endure the most grievous sufferings and death, and that afterwards he should be exalted to a divine dominion and glory, and that the Gentiles should be enlightened by his doctrine, and receive his law. That accordingly, at the time which had been signified in these predictions, that admirable person appeared. That he taught a most pure and heavenly doctrine, prescribed the most holy and excellent laws, and brought the most perfect scheme of religion which had ever been published to the world; and at the same time exhibited in his own sacred life and practice an example of the most consummate holiness and goodness. That in proof of his divine mission he performed the most wonderful works, manifestly transcending the utmost efforts of all human power or skill, and this in a vast number of instances, and in the most open and public manner, for a course of years together. That he most clearly and expressly foretold that he was to undergo the most grievous sufferings, and a cruel and ignominious death, and should afterwards rise again from the dead on the third day. And to this he appealed as the most convincing proof of his divine mission. That accordingly he suffered the death of the cross, in the face of a vast multitude of spectators; and notwithstanding the chief men of the Jewish nation, by whose instigation he was crucified, took the most prudent and effectual precautions to prevent an imposition in this matter, he rose again from the dead at the time

appointed, with circumstances of great glory, in a manner which struck terror into the guards who were set to watch the sepulchre. That afterwards he showed himself alive to many of those who were most intimately acquainted with him, and who, far from discovering a too forward credulity, could not be brought to believe it, till they found themselves constrained to do so by the testimony of all their senses. That as a farther proof of his resurrection and exaltation, they who witnessed it were themselves enabled to perform the most wonderful miracles in his name, and by power derived from him, and were endued with the most extraordinary gifts and powers, that they might spread his religion through the world, amidst the greatest oppositions and discouragements. That accordingly this religion, though propagated by the seemingly meanest and most unlikely instruments, and not only destitute of all worldly advantages, but directly opposite to the prevailing superstitions, prejudices, and vices both of Jews and Gentiles, and though it exposed its publishers and followers to all manner of reproaches, persecutions, and sufferings, yet in that very age made the most surprising progress; in consequence of which, the religion of Jesus was established in a considerable part of the world, and so continueth unto this day.

Such is the view of the evidence of the resurrection of Jesus; and, taking it altogether, it forms such a concatenation of proofs, as is every way suitable to the importance of the fact, and which was never equalled in any other case. To suppose all this evidence to have been given in attestation to a falsehood, involveth in it the most palpable absurdities. It is to suppose, either that God would employ his own prescience and power to give testimony to an impostor, by a series of the most illustrious prophecies and numerous uncontrolled miracles; or that good beings, superior to man, would extraordinarily interpose for the same purpose, to countenance and derive credit to a person falsely pretending to be sent from God, and feigning to act in his name; or that evil spirits would use all their arts and their power to attest and confirm a religion, the manifest tendency of which was to destroy idolatry, superstition, and vice, wherever it was sincerely believed and embraced, and to recover mankind to holiness and happiness; which is a contradiction to their very nature and character. It is to suppose that a number of persons would combine in attesting falsehoods in favour of a person who they knew had deceived them, and of a religion contrary to their most inveterate and favourite prejudices, and by which they had a prospect of gaining nothing but misery, reproach, sufferings, and death; which is absolutely contrary to all the principles and passions of the human nature. It is to suppose that persons of the greatest simplicity and plainness would act the part of the vilest impostors; or that men who were so bad, so false, and impious, as to be capable of carrying on a series of the most solemn impositions in the name of God himself, would, at the hazard of all that is dear to men, and in manifest opposition to all their worldly interests, endeavour to bring over the nations to embrace a holy and self-denying institution; or that they were enthusiasts, who were

carried away by the heat of their own distempered brains to imagine that for a series of years together, the most extraordinary facts were done before their eyes, though no such things were done at all, and that they were themselves enabled actually to perform the most wonderful works in the most open and public manner, though they performed no such works. It is to suppose that such mad enthusiasts, who were also mean and contemptible in their condition, and for the most part ignorant and illiterate, were not only capable of forming the noblest scheme of religion which was ever published to mankind, but were able to overcome all the learning, wealth, power, and eloquence of the world, all the bigotry and superstition of the nations, all the influence and artifices of the priests, all the power and authority of the magistrates. That they did this by only alleging that they had a commission in the name of a person who had been crucified, whom they affirmed, but without giving any proof of it, to have been risen from the dead, and to be exalted as the Saviour and Lord of mankind. All this is such a complication of absurdities, as cannot be admitted but upon principles that are absolutely abhorrent to the common sense and reason of men. It were easy to enlarge farther on this subject; but this may suffice at present, especially considering that Mr. Adams hath urged many things to this purpose with great clearness and force, in his answer to Mr. Hume's Essay, p. 31—36. And what is there to oppose to all this? Nothing but the single difficulty of restoring a dead man to life, which is indeed a very extraordinary and miraculous event, but is not above the power of God to effect, and, supposing a good and valid reason can be assigned for it worthy of the divine wisdom and goodness, involveth in it no absurdity at all. And such a reason it certainly was, to give an illustrious attestation to the divine mission of the holy Jesus, and to the divine original of the most excellent dispensation of religion that was ever published among men. To talk, as this author does, of the diminution of the evidence in proportion to the difficulty of the case, is trifling; for the evidence is here supposed to be fully proportioned to the difficulty and importance of the case; since there is both a power assigned every way able to effect it, and a valuable end, which makes it reasonable to think it was becoming the divine wisdom and goodness to interpose for effecting it.

You will perhaps think this may be sufficient with regard to the first part of Mr. Hume's *Essay on Miracles*. In my next, I shall endeavour to make it appear that we have the highest reason to think that the evidence, which hath been argued to be sufficient if given, was really and actually given; and shall answer the several considerations he hath offered to show, that supposing miracles capable of being proved by evidence or testimony, yet no evidence was ever actually given for miracles, which can be reasonably depended upon.

LETTER XIX.

Reflections on the second Part of Mr. Hume's *Essay on Miracles*, which is designed to show, that in fact there never was a miraculous Event established upon such Evidence as can be depended on—What he offers, concerning the necessary Conditions and Qualifications of Witnesses in the Case of Miracles, considered—It is shown that the Witnesses to the Miracles in Proof of Christianity had all the Conditions and Qualifications that can be required to render any Testimony good and valid—Concerning the Proneness of Mankind in all Ages to believe wonders, especially in Matters of Religion—This no Reason for rejecting all Miracles without further Examination—The Miracles wrought in Proof of Christianity not done in an ignorant and barbarous Age—His Pretence that different Miracles wrought in favour of different Religions destroy one another, and show that none of them are true—The Absurdity of this Way of Reasoning shown—Instances produced by him of Miracles well attested, and which yet ought to be rejected as false and incredible—A particular Examination of what he hath offered concerning the Miracles attributed to the Abbé de Paris, and which he pretends much surpass those of our Saviour in Credit and Authority.

SIR,

I NOW proceed to consider the second part of Mr. Hume's *Essay on Miracles*. The first was designed to show that miracles are incapable of being proved by any evidence whatsoever, and that no evidence or testimony that could be given, let us suppose it ever so full and strong, would be a sufficient ground for believing the truth and existence of miracles. And now in his second part he proceeds to show, that supposing a miracle capable of being proved by full and sufficient evidence or testimony, yet in fact, there never was a *miraculous event* in any history established upon such evidence as can reasonably be depended upon. To this purpose he offereth several considerations. The first is designed to prove that no witnesses have ever been produced for any miracle, which have all the necessary conditions and qualifications, to render their testimony credible. The second consideration is drawn from the proneness there has been in mankind in all ages to believe wonders; and the more for their being absurd and incredible; especially in matters of religion; and that therefore in this case all men of sense should reject them without further examination. His third observation is, that they are always found to abound most among ignorant and barbarous nations. His fourth observation is drawn from the opposite miracles wrought in different religions which destroy one another; so that there is no miracle wrought, but what is opposed by an infinite number of others. He then goes on to give an account of some miraculous facts which seem to be well attested, and yet are to be rejected as false and incredible. This is the substance of this part of his *Essay*, which he concludes with an insolent boast,

as if he thought he had so clearly demonstrated what he undertook, that no man who had not his *understanding* miraculously subverted could oppose it. But I apprehend it will appear, upon a distinct examination of what he hath offered, that there is little ground for such confident boasting.

The principal consideration is that which he hath mentioned in the first place, drawn from the want of competent testimony to ascertain the truth of miraculous facts. He affirms, "that there is not to be found in all history any miracle attested by a sufficient number of men, of such unquestionable good sense, education, and learning, as to secure us against all delusion in themselves; of such undoubted integrity, as to place them beyond all suspicion of any design to deceive others; of such credit and reputation in the eyes of mankind, as to have a great deal to lose in case of being detected in any falsehood; and at the same time attesting facts performed in such a public manner, and in so celebrated a part of the world, as to render the detection unavoidable; all which circumstances are requisite to give us a full assurance in the testimony of men."*

Here he supposes that where these circumstances concur, we may have *full assurance in the testimony of men* concerning the facts they relate, however extraordinary and unusual. Let us therefore examine the conditions and qualifications he insists upon, as necessary to render a testimony good and valid, and apply them to the testimony of the witnesses of Christianity, and the extraordinary miraculous facts whereby it was confirmed, especially that of our Saviour's resurrection.

The first thing he insisteth upon is, that the miracle should be *attested by a sufficient number of men*. He hath not told us what number of witnesses he takes to be sufficient in such a case. In some cases very few may be sufficient; yea, a single evidence may be so circumstanced as to produce a sufficient assurance and conviction in the mind, even concerning a fact of an extraordinary nature; though where there is a concurrence of many good witnesses, it is undoubtedly an advantage, and tendeth to give farther force to the evidence. And as to this, Christianity hath all the advantages that can reasonably be desired. All the apostles were the authorized witnesses of the principal facts by which Christianity is attested; so were the seventy disciples, and the hundred-and-twenty, mentioned Acts ii. 15, 21, 22, who had been with Jesus from the commencement of his personal ministry to his ascension into heaven; to which might be added many others who had seen his illustrious miracles, as well as heard his excellent instructions. The accounts of these things were published in that very age, and the facts were represented as having been done, and the discourses as having been delivered, in the presence of multitudes; so that in effect they appealed to thousands in Judea, Jerusalem, and Galilee. It is true, that as to the resurrection of Christ, this was not a fact done before all the people; but there was a number of witnesses to it, sufficient to attest any fact. Christ showed himself

* Philosophical Essays, p. 183.

alive after his passion to several persons at different times, whose testimony give mutual support and force to one another. He showed himself also to all the apostles in a body, to several other disciples, and at last to five hundred at once. To which it may be added, that all the extraordinary facts and wonderful works wrought by the apostles and first publishers of Christianity, many of which were of a very public nature, and done in the view of multitudes, came in aid of their testimony.

As to the qualifications of the witnesses, the first thing he requireth is that "they should be of such unquestionable good sense, education, and learning, as to secure us against all delusion in themselves." The reason why this gentleman here mentioneth *learning* and *education* as necessary qualifications in witnesses, is evident. It is undoubtedly with a view to exclude the apostles, who, except St. Paul, appear not to have been persons of education and learning. But no court of judicature, in inquiring into facts, looks upon it to be necessary that the person giving testimony to the truth of those facts should be persons who had a learned education; it is sufficient if they appear to be persons of sound sense and honest characters, and that the facts were such that they had an opportunity of being well acquainted with. And thus it was with regard to the first witnesses of Christianity. They were not indeed persons eminent for their learning, knowledge, and experience in the world; if they had been so, this might probably have been regarded as a suspicious circumstance, as if they themselves laid the scheme, and it was the effect of their own art and contrivance. But they were persons of plain sense, and sound understanding, and perfectly acquainted with the facts they relate. This sufficiently appeareth from their writings, and the accounts they have left us. Their narrations are plain and consistent, delivered in a simple, unaffected style, without any pomp of words or ostentation of eloquence or literature on the one hand, and on the other without any of the rants of enthusiasm. All is calm, cool, and sedate, the argument of a composed spirit. There is nothing that betrayeth an overheated imagination; nor do they ever fly out into passionate exclamations, even where the subject might seem to warrant it. The facts they relate were of such a nature, and so circumstanced, that they could not themselves be deceived in them, supposing they had their senses, or be made to believe they were done before their eyes when they were not done. This must be acknowledged as to the facts done during Christ's personal ministry. For they were constantly with him in his going out and coming in, and had an opportunity of observing those facts in all their circumstances for a course of years together, and therefore could be as perfectly assured of them as any man can be of any facts whatsoever, which he himself hears and sees. And as to his resurrection, they were not forward rashly to give credit to it by an enthusiastic heat; they examined it scrupulously, and would not receive it, till compelled by irresistible evidence, and by the testimony of all their senses.

The next thing he insisteth upon is, that "the witnesses should

be of such undoubted integrity, as to place them beyond all suspicion of any design to deceive others." Apply this to the witnesses of the miraculous facts whereby Christianity was attested, and it will appear that never were there persons who were more remote from all reasonable suspicion of fraud, or a design to impose falsehoods upon mankind. They appeared by their whole temper and conduct to be persons of great probity and unaffected simplicity, strangers to artful cunning, and the refinements of human policy. It mightily strengthens this when it is considered, that as the case was circumstanced, they could have no temptation to endeavour to impose these things upon the world if they had not been true, but had the strongest inducements to the contrary. They could have no prospect of serving their worldly interest, or answering the ends of ambition, by preaching up a religion, contrary to all the prevailing passions and prejudices of Jews and Gentiles, a principal article of which was salvation through a crucified Jesus. They could scarce have had a reasonable expectation of gaining so much as a single proselyte, to so absurd and foolish a scheme, as it must have been, supposing they had known that all was false, and that Jesus had never risen at all. How could it have been expected in such a case, that they should be able to persuade the Jews to receive for their Messiah one that had been put to an ignominious death by the heads of their nation, as an impostor or deceiver? or that they should persuade the Gentiles to acknowledge and worship a crucified Jew for their Lord, in preference to their long-adored deities, and to abandon all their darling superstitions for a strict and self-denying discipline? The only thing that can be pretended as a possible inducement to them, to endeavour to impose upon mankind, is what this writer afterwards mentions. "What greater temptation," saith he, "than to appear a missionary, a prophet, and ambassador from heaven? Who would not encounter many dangers and difficulties to attain so sublime a character? Or if persuaded of it himself, would scruple a pious fraud in prospect of so holy an end?"* But there is no room for such a suspicion in the case we are now considering. If they had pretended a revelation in favour of a Messiah, suited to the Jewish carnal notions and prejudices, who was to erect a mighty worldly dominion, arrayed with all the pomp of secular glory and grandeur, they might have expected honour and applause in being looked upon as his ministers. But what honour could they propose from being regarded as the disciples and apostles of one that had been condemned and put to a shameful death by public authority? To set up as his ambassadors, and pretend to be inspired by his spirit, and to be commissioned by him to go through the world, preaching up Jesus Christ, and him crucified; this was in all appearance the readiest way they could take to expose themselves to general scorn, derision, and reproach; and they must have been absolutely out of their senses to have expected that any veneration should be paid to them

* *Philosophical Essays*, p. 200.

under this character, supposing they had no other proof to bring of their crucified master's being risen, and exalted in glory as the universal Lord and Saviour, but their own word. Thus it appears, that they could have no inducements or temptations, according to all the principles or motives that usually work upon the human mind, to attempt to impose this scheme of religion, and the facts by which it was supported, if they had known them to be false; and if they had been false, they must have known them to be so. But this is not all. They had the strongest possible inducements to the contrary. The scheme of religion they preached, and which these facts were designed to attest, was directly opposite to their own most rooted prejudices. On the supposition of Christ's not having risen, they must have been sensible that he had deceived them; that the promises and predictions with which he amused them were false; and that consequently they could have no hopes from him, either in this world or in the next. At the same time they could not but foresee, that by pretending he was risen from the dead, and setting him up for the Messiah after he had been crucified, they should incur the indignation of the body of their own nation, and the hatred and contempt of those in chief authority among them. They could not possibly expect anything but what they met with, persecutions, reproaches, shame, and sufferings, both from Jews and Gentiles. Their exposing themselves to these things may be accounted for, if they were persuaded that what they witnessed was really true, though even in that case it required great virtue and constancy and divine supports. But that they should, in manifest opposition to their own religious prejudices and worldly interests, without the least prospect of any thing to be gained by it here or hereafter, persist to the very death in attesting a falsehood, known by themselves to be so; and that they should, for the sake of one who they knew had deceived them, expose themselves to the greatest evils and sufferings, to which all men have naturally the strongest aversion, is a supposition that cannot be admitted with the least appearance of reason, as being absolutely subversive of all the principles and passions of human nature. Our author ought to acknowledge the force of this reasoning, since he taketh pains throughout his whole Essay on Liberty and Necessity, to show, that we may in many cases argue as surely and strongly from the power and influence of motives on the human mind, as from the influence of physical causes; and that there is as great a certainty and as necessary a connexion in what are called moral causes as in physical. This author undoubtedly in that Essay carrieth it too far, when, in order to subvert human liberty, he would have it thought, that in all cases the power of motives worketh with as necessary a force upon the mind, as any physical cause doth upon the effect. But that in many particular cases things may be so circumstanced with regard to moral causes, as to afford a certainty equal to what arises from physical, cannot reasonably be denied. And such is the case here put. And he expressly declareth, that "we cannot make use of a more convincing argument than to prove,

that the actions ascribed to any person are contrary to the course of nature, and that no human motives in such circumstances could ever induce them to such conduct.”*

This writer farther requireth, that “the witnesses should be of such credit and reputation in the eyes of mankind as to have a great deal to lose in case of being detected in any falsehood.” If the meaning be, that they must be persons distinguished by their rank and situation in the world, and of great reputation for knowledge and for the eminency of their station and figure in life; this in the case here referred to would, instead of strengthening, have greatly weakened the force of their testimony. It might have been said, with some show of plausibility, that such persons, by their knowledge and abilities, their reputation and interest, might have it in their power to countenance and propagate an imposture among the people, and give it some credit in the world. If the facts recorded in the gospel, the miracles and resurrection of Jesus Christ, had been patronised and attested by the chief priests and rulers of the Jewish nation, it would undoubtedly have been pretended that they had political designs in view, and that, considering their authority and influence, they might more easily impose those things upon the multitude. On this view of things the evidence for those important facts would have been far less convincing than now it is. And therefore the divine wisdom hath ordered it far better, in appointing that the first witnesses of the gospel were not the worldly *wise, mighty, or noble*, but persons of mean condition, and yet of honest characters, without power, authority, or interest. And whereas this writer urgeth, that the witnesses ought to be of *such reputation as to have a great deal to lose in case of being detected in a falsehood*, it ought to be considered that a man of true probity, though in a low condition, may be as unwilling to be branded as a cheat and an impostor, and as desirous to preserve his good name, which may be almost all he has to value himself upon, as persons of greater figure and eminence in the world, who may more easily find means to support themselves, and to evade detection and punishment. The apostles indeed rejoiced that they were counted *worthy to suffer shame for the name of Christ*, Acts v. 41. But this was not owing to their being insensible to shame, but to the testimony of a good conscience, and to the full persuasion they had of Christ’s divine mission, and the divinity of the religion they preached in his name. This particularly was the principle upon which St. Paul acted, who was a man of reputation among the Jews, and would never have made a sacrifice of this, and of all his worldly interests and expectations, to join himself to a despised persecuted party, and against whom he himself had conceived the strongest prejudices, if he had not been brought over, by an evidence which he was not able to resist, to the acknowledgment of the Christian faith, and of the extraordinary facts of which it was established.

* Philosophical Essays, p. 135.

The last thing he insisteth upon is, that the facts attested by the witnesses should be "performed in such a public manner, and in so celebrated a part of the world, as to render the detection unavoidable." This may be applied with the greatest propriety to the extraordinary and miraculous facts by which Christianity was attested. Justly doth St. Paul appeal to King Agrippa, in the admirable apology he made before him and the Roman governor, Festus, and which was delivered before a numerous and august assembly of Jews and Romans, that *none of these things were hidden from him*; for, saith he, *this thing was not done in a corner*, Acts xxvi. 26. Christ's whole personal ministry, and the wonderful works he wrought were transacted, not in a private and secret, but in the most open and public manner possible, in places of the greatest concourse, and before multitudes of people assembled from all parts. The same may be said of many of the miracles wrought by the apostles, in the name and by the power of a risen Jesus; and particularly never was there any event of a more public nature than the extraordinary effusion of the Holy Ghost on the day of Pentecost. The first publishers of Christianity preached the religion of Jesus, and performed miracles in confirmation of it, not merely in small villages, or obscure parts of the country, but in populous cities, in those parts of the world that were most celebrated for the liberal arts, learning, and politeness. They published their religion, and the wonderful facts by which it was supported throughout the Lesser Asia, Greece, Italy; in the cities of Jerusalem, Antioch, Ephesus, Corinth, Thessalonica, Philippi, Athens, and Rome itself. If therefore their pretences had been false, they could scarce have possibly escaped a detection; especially considering that they were everywhere under the eye of watchful adversaries, unbelieving Jews as well as heathens, who would not have failed to detect and expose the imposture, if there had been any. As to what the author afterwards allegeth, that "in the infancy of new religions the wise and learned commonly esteem the matter too inconsiderable to deserve their attention and regard; and when afterwards they would willingly detect the cheat, in order to undeceive the deluded multitude, the season is now gone, and the records and witnesses who might clear up the matter, are perished beyond recovery;"* this pretence hath no place in the case we are now considering with regard to Christianity. That religion met with the greatest opposition even in its infancy. Persons of principal authority in the nation where it first arose, bent their attention and employed their power to suppress it. And in all places where it was afterwards propagated, there were unbelieving Jews, who used their utmost efforts to stir up the heathens against it, who of themselves were strongly inclined by their own prejudices to oppose it; and this at the very time when, if the facts had been false, it would have been the easiest thing in the world to have detected the falsehood, which in that case must have been

* Philosophical Essays, p. 203.

known to thousands; since many of the facts appealed to were of a very public nature.

Thus I have considered the conditions and qualifications he insisteth upon, as necessary to give us a *full assurance in the testimony of men* with regard to miracles; and have shown that all the conditions that can be reasonably desired, concur with the highest degree of evidence, in the testimony given by the apostles and first witnesses of Christianity, to the extraordinary facts whereby its divine authority was established. Their testimony had some advantages which no other testimony ever had. St. Luke observes, that *with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus*, Acts iv. 33. The testimony they gave was accompanied with a divine power. The force of their testimony did not depend merely on their own veracity, but may be said to have been confirmed by the attestation of God himself. It is with the utmost propriety, therefore, that the sacred writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews representeth God, as *bearing them witness, both with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles and gifts of the Holy Ghost, according to his own will*, Heb. ii. 4. And it is incontestably true in fact, that so strong and convincing was the evidence, that great numbers both of Jews and Gentiles were brought over in that very age, to the faith of a crucified and risen Saviour. Nor was this the effect of a too forward credulity, since it was in direct opposition to their prejudices, passions, and worldly interests. The principles and inducements which usually lead men to form wrong and partial judgments, lay wholly on the other side, and, instead of being favourable to Christianity, tended rather to determine men to disbelieve and reject it, so that it may be justly said, that the propagation of that scheme of religion which is held forth in the gospel had something in it so wonderful, taking in all the circumstances of the case, that it affordeth a manifest and most convincing proof of the truth of the extraordinary facts upon which it was founded.

I now proceed to make some observations upon the other considerations this gentleman offers in the second part of his Essay, and which indeed can at best pass for no more than presumptions, and only show, that the testimony given to miracles is not rashly to be admitted, and that great care and caution is necessary in judging of them, which will be easily allowed.

The second consideration, and upon which he seems to lay a great stress, is this: "that we may observe in human nature a principle which, if strictly examined, will be found to diminish extremely the assurance we might have from human testimony in any kind of prodigy." He says, "that though for the most part we readily reject any fact that is unusual and incredible in an ordinary degree, yet when anything is affirmed utterly absurd and miraculous, the mind rather more readily admits such a fact, upon account of that very circumstance which ought to destroy all its authority. The passion of *surprise* and *wonder* arising from miracles, being an agreeable emotion, gives a sensible tendency towards the belief of

those events from which it is derived.—But if the spirit of religion join itself to the love of wonder, there is an end of common sense; and human testimony, in these circumstances, loses all pretensions to authority.* And again he observes, that “should a miracle be ascribed to any new system of religion, men in all ages have been so much imposed on by the ridiculous stories of this kind, that this very circumstance will be a full proof of a cheat, and sufficient with all men of sense, not only to make them reject the fact, but even reject it without farther examination.” And he repeats it again, that it should make us form a general resolution never to lend any attention to it, with whatever specious pretext it may be covered.† He here undertaketh to answer for all *men of sense* that they will reject all miracles produced in proof of religion without farther examination, because men in all ages have been much imposed on by ridiculous stories of this kind. But this certainly is the language, not of reason and good sense, which will dispose a man fairly to examine, but of the most obstinate prepossession and prejudice. No kinds of historical facts, whether of an ordinary or extraordinary nature, can be mentioned, in which men have frequently been imposed upon. But that is no just reason for rejecting such facts at once without examination; and the man that would do so, instead of proving his superior good sense, would only render himself ridiculous. That there have been many false miracles will be readily acknowledged; but this doth not prove that there never have been any true ones. It ought indeed to make us very cautious, and to examine miracles carefully before we receive them; but it is no reason at all, or a very absurd one, for rejecting them all at once without examination and inquiry. Thus to reject them can only be justified upon this principle, that it is not possible that there should be a true miracle wrought in favour of any system of religion. But by what medium will he undertake to prove this? He seems expressly to admit, that in other cases “there may possibly be miracles, or violations of the usual course of nature, of such a kind as to admit of proof from human testimony.”‡ This concession is not very consistent with what he had laboured in the first part of his Essay to show, with regard to all miracles in general, viz., that they are incapable of being proved by any testimony. But now, provided miracles be not produced in proof of religion, he seems willing to allow, that they may *possibly admit of proof from human testimony*. The only case therefore in which they are never to be believed, is when they are pretended to be wrought in favour of religion. But in this he seems to have both the reason of the thing and the general sense of mankind against him. It is certainly more reasonable to believe a miracle, when a valuable end can be assigned for it, than to believe it when we cannot discern any important end to be answered by it at all. And one of the most valuable ends for which a miracle can be supposed to be wrought seems to be this, to give an attestation to the divine mission of persons sent to instruct mankind in religious

* Philosophical Essays, p. 184, 185: † Ibid. p. 204, 205. ‡ Ibid. p. 203.

truths of great importance, and to lead them in the way of salvation. Our author seems sometimes to lay a mighty stress on the general opinion and common *sentiments* of mankind.* And there are few notions, which, by his own acknowledgment, have more generally obtained in all nations and ages than this, that there have been miracles actually wrought on some occasions, especially in matters of religion, and that they are to be regarded as proofs of a divine interposition. This is a principle which seems to be conformable to the natural sense of the human mind.

The observation he makes concerning the *agreeable emotion* produced by the *passion of wonder and surprise*, and the strong propensity *there is in mankind to the extraordinary and the marvellous*, proves nothing against this principle. The passion of wonder and surprise was certainly not given us in vain, but for very wise purposes; and it may be presumed that this passion, as well as others, may be rightly exercised upon proper objects. But I cannot agree with this gentleman, that men are naturally disposed and inclined to believe a thing the rather for its being *utterly absurd and miraculous*, especially in matters of religion. They may indeed, and often do, believe absurdities; but they never believe a thing merely because it is absurd, but because, taking all considerations together, they do not look upon it to be absurd. It may be observed, by the way, that this writer here makes *absurd* and *miraculous* to be terms of the same signification, whereas they are very different ideas. A miracle, when supposed to be wrought by a power adequate to the effect, and for excellent ends, is indeed wonderful, but has no absurdity in it at all. It is true, there have often been very absurd things recommended to popular belief under the notion of miracles, and such pretended miracles have been received without much examination, when wrought in favour of the established superstition. But even real miracles are received with difficulty, when they are wrought in opposition to it; and where the influence of the priesthood, the prejudices of the vulgar, and the authority of the magistrate, are on the one side, which was the case of Christianity at its first appearance. Considering the nature of that religion, how contrary it was to the prevailing notions and prejudices both of Jews and Gentiles, the strictness of the morals it prescribed, the scheme of salvation through a crucified Saviour which it proposed, the meanness of the instruments by which it was propagated, and the numberless difficulties it had to encounter with; the miracles wrought in attestation of it could not have met with a favourable reception in the world, if there had not been the most convincing evidence of their being really wrought. The strangeness of the facts, instead of producing belief, would rather have turned to its disadvantage, and could scarce have failed being detected in such circumstances, if they had been false.

His third observation is, that it "forms a very strong presumption against all supernatural relations, that they are always found

* *Essays Moral and Political*, p. 307.

chiefly to abound among ignorant and barbarous nations; or if a civilized people have ever given admission to any of them, they have received them from ignorant and barbarous ancestors.* But no presumption can be drawn from this to the prejudice of Christianity, which did not make its appearance in an ignorant and barbarous age, but at a time when the world was greatly civilized, and in nations where arts and learning had made a very great progress. And it must be considered, that it had not only their inveterate prejudices, their darling passions, and inclinations; but their pretended miracles to encounter with extraordinary facts received from their ancestors, who *transmitted them*, as he expresseth it, *with that inviolable sanction and authority, which always attends ancient and received opinions*. How strong and cogent therefore must the force of the evidence in behalf of the Christian religion, and the extraordinary miraculous facts designed to support it, have been, which, in the hands of such mean instruments, could make so great a progress in a civilized and enlightened age, and prove too hard for the religion of the empire; which, besides its being interwoven with the civil establishment, had the prescription of many ages to plead, and was supported by pretended miracles, prodigies, and oracles! Mr. Hume is pleased to take notice on this occasion of the management of that cunning impostor Alexander.† But though, the better to carry on the cheat, he had laid the scene among the barbarous Paphlagonians, who were reckoned among the most stupid and ignorant of the human race; and not only put in practice all the arts of imposture (though it doth not appear, that he pretended to work miracles among the people, or put the proof of his authority upon them), but had procured a powerful interest among the great to support him, he and his impostures soon sunk into oblivion, and so undoubtedly would Christianity too have done, if its extraordinary facts had no better foundation in truth and fact than his pretensions had.

"I may add," saith he, "as a fourth reason which diminishes the authority of prodigies, that there is no testimony for any, even those which have not been expressly detected, that is not opposed by an infinite number of witnesses; so that not only the miracle destroys the credit of the testimony, but even the testimony destroys itself." He goes on to observe, that "in matters of religion whatever is different is contrary; that it is impossible that all these different religions should be established on a solid foundation; that every miracle pretended to have been wrought in any of these religions, as it is designed to establish that particular system, has the same force to overthrow every other system; and consequently to destroy the credit of those miracles on which that system was established. So that all the prodigies of different religions are to be regarded as contrary facts, and the evidences of those prodigies as opposite to one another."‡ This writer is here

* Philosophical Essays, p. 186, 187.

† Ibid. p. 188, 189.

‡ Ibid. p. 190, 191.

pleased to confound *prodigies* and *miracles*, which ought to be distinguished. Many things that have passed under the notion of prodigies, are very far from being miracles, in the strict and proper sense in which we are now considering them: and if we speak of miracles properly so called, the supposition he here goes upon, *viz.* that all religions have been founded upon miracles, and have put the proof of their authority upon them, is manifestly false. It is well known, that Mahomet did not pretend to establish his religion by miracles; nor indeed can it be proved, that any systems of religion had any tolerable pretension of being originally founded upon miracles, but the Jewish and the Christian; and these, though in some respects *different*, are not *contrary*, but mutually support each other; the former being introductive and preparatory to the latter. But if his supposition should be admitted, that all religions in the world have been founded upon the credit of miracles, it is hard to comprehend the force of his reasoning. By what logic doth it follow, that because miracles have been believed by mankind in all ages and nations to have been wrought in proof of religion, therefore miracles were never really wrought at all in proof of religion, nor are they ever to be believed in any single instance? With the same force it may be argued, that because there have been and are many opposite schemes of religion in the world, therefore their being opposite to one another proves that they are all false, and that there is no such thing as true religion in the world at all. But let us suppose ever so great a number of falsehoods opposed to truth, that opposition of falsehood to truth doth not make truth to be less true, or destroy the certainty and evidence of it. Supposing the religions to be opposite, and that miracles are said to be wrought in attestation of those opposite religions, it may indeed be fairly concluded that they cannot be all true, but not that none of them is so. Our author himself seems to be apprehensive, that this might be looked upon as a fallacious way of reasoning. "This argument," says he, "may appear very subtle and refined; but is not in reality different from the reasoning of a judge, who supposes, that the credit of two witnesses, maintaining a crime against any one, is destroyed by the testimony of two others, who affirm him to have been two hundred leagues distant at the same instant when the crime is said to have been committed."* This gentleman has here given us a most extraordinary specimen, how well qualified he would be to determine causes if he sat in a court of judicature. If there came several witnesses before him, and their testimony was opposite to one another, he would without farther examination reject them all at once, and make their opposition to one another to be alone a proof that they were all false, and none of them to be depended upon. But it hath been hitherto thought reasonable, when testimonies are opposite, to weigh and compare those testimonies, in order to form a proper judgment concerning them. In case of *alibi's*, which is the

* Philosophical Essays, p. 199.

case the author here puts, the testimonies do not always destroy one another. A just and impartial judge will not immediately reject the testimonies on both sides without examination, because they contradict one another, which is the method our author seems here to recommend as reasonable, but will carefully compare them, that he may find out on which side the truth lies, and which of the testimonies is most to be credited, and will give his judgment accordingly. This certainly is the course which right reason prescribeth in all cases, where there is an opposition of testimony, and which it is to be presumed this gentleman himself would recommend in every case, but where the cause of religion is concerned. For here, notwithstanding all his pretensions to freedom of thinking, his prejudices are so strong, that he is for proceeding by different weights and measures from what he and all mankind would judge reasonable in every other instance. He hath showed himself so little qualified to judge impartially in matters of this nature, that I believe *men of sense*, to use his own phrase, will lay very little stress on any judgment he shall think fit to pronounce in this cause.

The only part of Mr. Hume's *Essay on Miracles* which now remaineth to be considered, is that which relates to some particular accounts of miraculous facts, which he would have us believe are as well or better attested, than those recorded in the Gospels, and yet are to be rejected as false and incredible. The first instance he mentioneth is that of the Emperor Vespasian's curing a blind and a lame man at Alexandria, and which he affirms is one of the best attested miracles in all profane history. This has been urged by almost every deistical writer who hath treated of miracles: and how little it is to the purpose in the present controversy hath been often shown. Not to repeat what Mr. Adams hath well urged concerning it, it may be sufficient to observe, that it appeareth from the accounts given us by the historians who mention it,* that the design of these miracles was to give weight to the authority of Vespasian, newly made Emperor by the great men and the army, and to make it be believed that his elevation to the imperial throne was approved by the gods. I believe every reasonable man will be of opinion, that in any case of this kind, there is ground to suspect artifice and management. And who would be so presumptuous as to make too narrow a scrutiny into the truth of miracles, in which the interests of the great, and the authority of a mighty Emperor, were so nearly concentrated? And if, as this writer observes, from Tacitus, some who were present continued to relate these facts, even after Vespasian and his family were no longer in possession of the empire; it doth not appear, that the persons referred to were such as had been in the secret of the management, which probably lay in few hands; or if they were, it is not to be wondered at that they should afterwards be unwilling to own the part they had in this affair; especially since no methods were made use of to oblige them to discover the fraud.

* Tacit. Hist. lib. 4. versus finem. Sueton. in Vespas. cap. 8.

The next instance he produceth is the miracle pretended to have been wrought at Saragossa, and mentioned by Cardinal De Retz, who, by Mr. Hume's own account, did not believe it. But certainly a man must have his head very oddly turned, to attempt to draw a parallel between the miracles of our Saviour and his apostles, and miracles pretended to have been wrought in a country where the inquisition is established, where the influence and interests of the priests, the superstitions and prejudices of the people, and the authority of the civil magistrate, are all combined to support the credit of those miracles, and where it would be extremely dangerous to make a strict inquiry into the truth of them; and even the expressing the least doubt concerning them, might expose a man to the most terrible of all evils and sufferings.

But that which Mr. Hume seems to lay the greatest stress upon, and on which he enlarges for some pages together, is, the miracles reported to have been wrought at the tomb of the Abbé de Paris. Having observed, that in the *Recueil des Miracles de l'Abbé de Paris*, there is a parallel run between the miracles of our Saviour and those of the Abbé, he pronounces, that "if the inspired writers were to be considered merely as human testimony, the French author is very moderate in his comparison, since he might with some appearance of reason pretend, that the Jansenist miracles much surpass the others in credit and authority."*

This has been of late a favourite topic with the deists. Great triumphs have been raised upon it, as if it were alone sufficient to destroy the credit of the miraculous facts recorded in the New Testament. I shall therefore make some observations upon it, though in doing so I shall be obliged to take notice of several things which Mr. Adams hath already observed, in his judicious reflections upon this subject, in his answer to Mr. Hume's *Essay on Miracles*, from page 65 to page 78.

The account Mr. Hume pretends to give of this whole affair is very unfair and disingenuous, and is absolutely unworthy of any man that makes pretensions to a free and impartial inquiry. He positively asserts, that the miraculous facts were so strongly proved, that the Molinists or Jesuits were never able distinctly to refute or detect them; and that they could not deny the truth of the facts, but ascribed them to witchcraft and the devil. Yet certain it is, that the Jesuits or Molinists did deny many of the facts to be true as the Jansenists related them; that they asserted them to be false, and plainly proved several of them to be so. Particularly the Archbishop of Sens distinctly insisted upon twenty-two of those pretended miraculous facts, all which he charged as owing to falsehood and imposture.

He farther observes, that twenty-two of the Curés or Rectors of Paris pressed the Archbishop of Paris to examine those miracles, and asserted them to be known to the whole world. But he knew, or might have known, that some of those very miracles which those

* Philosophical Essays, p. 196.

gentlemen desired might be particularly inquired into, and which they represented as undeniably true and certain, were afterwards examined, and the perjury of the principal witnesses plainly detected.* And the Archbishop, who, he tells us, wisely forbore an inquiry, caused a public judicial inquest to be made, as Mr. Adams observes, and in an ordinance of November 8, 1735, published the most convincing proofs, that the miracles so strongly vouched by the Curés, were forged and counterfeited.†

Mr. Hume is pleased to observe, that "the Molinist party tried to discredit those miracles in one instance, that of Mademoiselle le Franc, but were not able to do it:" where he speaks, as if this were the single instance in which they tried to discredit those miracles, which is far from being true. This indeed was taken particular notice of because it was the first history of a miraculous fact which the Jansenists thought fit to publish, with a pompous dissertation prefixed. It was cried up as of such unquestionable truth, that it could not be denied without doubting of the most certain facts: and yet the story was proved to be false in the most material circumstances, by forty witnesses judicially examined upon oath. It was plainly proved, that she was considerably better of her maladies before she went to the tomb at all: that she was no stronger when she returned from the tomb than she was when she went to it: and that she still stood in need of remedies afterwards. Mr. Hume indeed takes upon him to declare, that the proceedings were the most irregular in the world, particularly in citing but a few of the Jansenist witnesses, whom they tampered with: and then he adds, "besides they were soon overwhelmed with a cloud of new witnesses, an hundred and twenty in number, who gave oath for the miracles." He doth not say, they all gave oath for this particular miracle, but for the miracles: and indeed most of these testimonies were very little to the purpose, and seemed to be designed rather for parade and show than for proof; and nothing turned more to the disadvantage of the Jansenists, than their endeavouring still to maintain the credit of this miracle, after the falsehood of it had been so evidently detected: the more witnesses they endeavoured to produce for this, the more they rendered themselves suspected in all the rest. They alleged some want of formality in the proceedings, but were never able to disprove the principal circumstances of the facts alleged on the other side, and which were absolutely inconsistent with the truth and reality of the miracle.‡

Mr. Hume refers his reader to the *Recueil des Miracles de l'Abbé de Paris*, in three volumes: but especially to the famous book of Mr. de Montgeron, a counsellor or judge of the parliament of Paris, and which was dedicated to the French King. But if he had read on both sides, or had thought fit to lay the matter fairly before his

* Des Voeux's Critique Générale, p. 242, 243. † Adam's Essay, p. 71.

‡ This whole matter is set in a clear light in Mr. Des Voeux's Dissertation sur les Miracles, &c., p. 46, 49, and in his Critique Générale. p. 204, 231, 232.

reader, he might have informed him that these books have been solidly answered by Mr. des Voeux, a very ingenious and judicious author, who had himself been bred up among the Jansenists, and was at Paris part of the time that this scene was carrying on. See his *Lettres sur les Miracles*, published in 1735, and his *Critique Générale du Livre de Mr. de Montgeron*, in 1741. See also what relates to this subject in the 19th and 20th tomes of the *Bibliothèque Raisonnée*.

There never was perhaps a book written with a greater air of assurance and confidence, than that of Mr. de Montgeron. He intitles it, *The Truth of the Miracles wrought by the Intercession of M. de Paris and other Appellants, demonstrated against M. the Archbishop of Sens*. It was natural therefore to expect, that he would have attempted to justify all those miracles which that prelate had attacked. But of twenty-two which are distinctly insisted upon by the Archbishop, there are seventeen which Mr. de Montgeron does not meddle with. He hath passed by those of them against which the strongest charges of falsehood and imposture lay. Five of the miracles attacked by the Archbishop, he takes pains to justify; to which he has added four more, which that prelate had not distinctly considered. Mr. des Voeux, who has examined this work of Mr. de Montgeron with great care and judgment, hath plainly shown, that there are everywhere to be discovered in it marks of the strongest prepossession.* Carried away by the power of his prejudices, and by his affection to the Jansenist cause, to which he was greatly attached, he has in several instances disguised and misrepresented facts in a manner which cannot be excused or vindicated. The last-mentioned author has charged him with faults, not merely of inadvertency, but with direct falsifications designed to impose upon the public. See the sixth letter of his *Critique Générale*, page 208, *et seq.* Mr. Hume has taken care not to give his reader the least hint of any thing of this nature.

The remarks which have been now made may help us to judge of Mr. Hume's conduct in his management of this subject.

I shall now proceed to make some observations upon the remarkable differences there are between the miracles recorded in the gospels, and those ascribed to the Abbé de Paris; by considering which it will appear, that no argument can be justly drawn from the latter to discredit the former, or to invalidate the proofs produced for them.

I. One observation of no small weight is this: at the time when the miracles of the Abbé de Paris first appeared, there was a strong and numerous party in France, and which was under the conduct of very able and learned men, who were strongly prepossessed in favour of that cause which those miracles seemed to be intended to support: and it might naturally be expected, that these would use all their interest and influence for maintaining and

* The character of Mr. de Montgeron is well represented by Mr. Adams, in his Answer to Hume, p. 74, 75.

spreading the credit of them among the people. And so it actually happened. The first rumours of these miracles were eagerly laid hold on; and they were cried up as real and certain miracles, and as giving a clear decision of Heaven on the side of the appellants, even before there was any regular proof so much as pretended to be given for them.* To which it may be added, that the beginning of this whole affair was at a very promising conjuncture, *viz.* when the Cardinal de Noailles was archbishop of Paris; who, whatever may be said of his capacity and integrity, which Mr. Hume highly extols, was well known to be greatly inclined to favour the cause of the appellants. It was therefore a situation of things very favourable to the credit of those miracles, that they first appeared under his administration, and were tried before his officials; and though the succeeding archbishop was no friend to the Jansenists, yet when once the credit of those miracles was in some measure established, and they had got the popular vogue on their side, the affair was more easily carried on. But at the first appearance of Christianity, the circumstances of things were entirely different. There were indeed parties among the Jews, the most powerful of which were the Pharisees and Sadducees, besides the priests and rulers of the Jews, and the Sanhedrim, or great council of the nation: but not one of these afforded the least countenance to the first witnesses and publishers of the Christian religion. Our Lord, far from addicting himself to any party, freely declared against what was amiss in every one of them: he opposed the distinguishing tenets of the Sadducees; the traditions, superstitions, and hypocrisy of the Pharisees, and the prejudices of the vulgar. Christianity proceeded upon a principle directly contrary to that, in which all parties among the Jews were agreed, *viz.* upon the doctrine of a spiritual kingdom, and a suffering Messiah: and accordingly all the different sects and parties, all the powers civil and ecclesiastical, united their interests and endeavours to oppose and suppress it. Whatever suspicion therefore might be entertained with regard to the miracles said to have been wrought at the tomb of the Abbé de Paris, which had a strong party from the beginning prepared to receive and support them, no such suspicion can reasonably be admitted as to the truth and reality of the extraordinary facts whereby Christianity was attested, which, as the case was circumstanced, could scarce possibly have made their way in the manner they did, or have escaped detection, if they had not been true.

II. Another consideration, which shows a remarkable difference between the miracles recorded to have been wrought by our Saviour and his apostles, and those ascribed to the Abbé de Paris, is this: That the former carry plain characters of a divine interposition, and a supernatural power; and the latter, even taking their own account of them, do not appear to be evidently miraculous, as they may be accounted for without supposing any thing properly

* Critique Générale, let. vi.

supernatural in the case. Our Lord Jesus Christ not only healed all manner of diseases, but he raised the dead: he commanded the winds and the seas, and they obeyed him: he searched the hearts, and knew the thoughts of men: he gave many express and circumstantial predictions of future contingencies, both relating to his own sufferings and death, and to his consequent resurrection and exaltation, and relating to the calamities that should come upon the Jews, the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple, and the wonderful propagation and establishment of his church and kingdom in the world, which it was impossible for any man, judging by the rules of human probability, to foresee: he not only performed the most wonderful works himself, but he imparted the same miraculous power to his disciples, and poured forth upon them the extraordinary gifts of the Holy Ghost, as he had promised and foretold: gifts of the most admirable nature, which were never paralleled before or since, and which were peculiarly fitted for spreading and propagating the Christian religion. With regard to these, and other things which might be mentioned, no man has ever pretended to draw a comparison between the miracles ascribed to the Abbé de Paris, and those of our Saviour; and accordingly one of the most zealous and able advocates for the former, M. Le Gros, expressly acknowledgeth, that there is *an infinite difference between them*, and declares that he *will never forget that difference*. The only instance in which a parallel is pretended to be drawn, is with regard to miraculous cures, which, alone considered, are the most uncertain and equivocal of all miracles. Diseases have often been surprisingly cured, without anything that can be properly called miraculous in the case. Wonderful has been the effect of medicines administered in certain circumstances; and some maladies, after having long resisted all the art and power of remedies, have gone off of themselves by the force of nature, or by some surprising and unexpected turn, in a manner that cannot be distinctly explained. Yet it may be observed, that there were several circumstances attending the miraculous cures wrought by our Saviour and his apostles, which plainly showed them to be divine. The cures were wrought in an instant, by a commanding word. The blind, the lame, those that laboured under the most obstinate and inveterate diseases, found themselves immediately restored at once with an Almighty facility. If there had been only a few instances of this kind, it might possibly have been attributed to some odd accident, or hidden cause, which could not be accounted for; but the instances of such complete and instantaneous cures wrought by our Saviour were very numerous. They extended to all manner of diseases, and to all persons without exception who applied to him: yea, he cured some that did not apply to him, who did not know him, or who were his enemies, and had no expectation of a cure, in which cases it could not be pretended that imagination had any share. In all these respects, there was a remarkable difference between the miraculous cures wrought by our Saviour, and those pretended to have been wrought at the tomb of the Abbé de Paris.

Several of their most boasted cures, and which were pretended to have been sudden and perfected at once, appear from their own accounts to have been carried on by slow degrees, and therefore might have been brought about in a natural way. Some of these cures were days, weeks, and even months, before they were perfected. One nine days' devotion followed another, and they were suffered to languish, and continue praying and supplicating for a considerable time together; and if the cure happened, and the distemper came to a crisis during the course of their long attendance, and whilst they were continuing their devotions, this passed for a miraculous cure, though it might well be done without any miracle at all: especially as several of those persons continued to be taking remedies, even whilst they were attending at the tomb. It is manifest from the relations published by themselves, that with regard to several of those who were pretended to be miraculously cured, their maladies had already begun to abate, and they had found considerable ease and relief in a natural way before they came to the tomb at all; and some of them seem by the force of their imagination to have believed themselves cured, when they were not so, or to have taken a temporary relief for an absolute cure. Several of the cures, the accounts of which were published with great pomp, could not with any propriety be said to have been perfected at all; since the persons said to have been cured, still continued infirm, and had returns of their former disorders. This can scarce be supposed, if the cures had been really miraculous, and owing to an extraordinary exertion of the power of God, who would not have left his own work imperfect. See all these things fully proved by many instances, in M. des Voeux's *Lettres sur les Miracles*: particularly in the fifth of these letters.

To all which it may be added, that of the vast numbers who came to the tomb to be cured, and who had recourse to the Abbé's intercession, there were but few on whom the cures were wrought, in comparison of those who found no benefit at all, though they applied to him with the utmost devotion, and continued to do so for a long time together: and indeed, considering how many there were that applied for help and cure, and how much they were prepossessed with the notions countenanced in the Romish church, of the power of departed saints, of the prevalency of their intercession, and the efficacy of their relics, and to what a height their imagination was raised by their prejudices in favour of the appellants, by the high opinion they had of the Abbé's extraordinary sanctity, by the rumours of miracles daily spread and propagated, and by the vast crowds which attended at the tomb, it would have been really a wonder, if, amongst the multitudes that came for cure, there had not been several who found themselves greatly relieved. The advocates for the miracles mightily extol the extraordinary faith and confidence the sick persons had in the intercession of the blessed Deacon, as they call him: and the force of their imagination, when carried to so extraordinary a pitch, might in some particular cases produce great effects. Many wonderful instances to this purpose

have been observed and recorded by the ablest physicians, by which it appears what a mighty influence imagination, accompanied with strong passions, hath often had upon human bodies, especially in the cure of diseases: it hath often done more in a short time this way, than a long course of medicines have been able to accomplish. It is not therefore to be much wondered at, that as the case was circumstanced, amidst such a multitude of persons some surprising cures were wrought: but it could not be expected that the effect would be constant and uniform. If it answered in some instances, it would fail in many more: and accordingly so it was with regard to these pretended miraculous cures. And if this had been the case in the extraordinary cures wrought by our Saviour, there would have been ground of suspicion, that what some have alleged might possibly have been true, that his miracles owed their force, not to any supernatural energy, but to the power of imagination. But taking these miracles as they are recorded in the gospels, it is manifest, that there can be no just ground for such a pretence. They exhibit evident proofs of a divine interposition, which cannot be said of those reported to have been wrought at the Abbé's tomb. M. de Montgeron, in his book dedicated to the King, published an account of eight or nine cures; and it is to be supposed, that he fixed upon those which he thought had the appearance of being most signally miraculous; and yet the very first of those miracles, *vis.* that affirmed to have been wrought upon Don Alphonso de Palacio, appeareth plainly, by taking the whole of the relation as M. Montgeron himself hath given it, to have had nothing in it properly miraculous, as Mr. Adams hath clearly shown.* And with regard both to that and the other miracles so pompously displayed by M. de Montgeron, M. Des Voeux has very ingeniously and judiciously, after a distinct examination of each of them, made it appear, that they might have been wrought without supposing any miraculous or supernatural interposition at all. See the last letter of his *Critique Générale*.

III. Another consideration, which shows the great difference there is between the miracles wrought at the first establishment of Christianity, and those said to have been wrought at the tomb of the Abbé de Paris, and that no argument can reasonably be brought from the latter to the prejudice of the former, is taken from the many suspicious circumstances attending the latter, from which the former were entirely free. Christ's miracles were wrought, in a grave and decent, in a great but simple manner, becoming one sent of God, without any absurd or ridiculous ceremonies, or superstitious observances. But the miracles of the Abbé de Paris were attended with circumstances that had all the marks of superstition, and which seemed designed and fitted to strike the imagination. The earth of his tomb was often made use of, or the waters of the well of his house. The nine days' devotion was constantly used, and frequently repeated again and again by the same persons; a

* Adams's Essay, in Answer to Hume, p. 76, 77.

ceremony derived originally from the Pagans, and which hath been condemned as superstitious by some eminent divines of the Romish church.* Another circumstance to be observed, with relation to Christ's miracles, is, that, as hath been already hinted, they were not only perfected at once, but the persons found themselves healed and restored without trouble or difficulty. But in the case of the cures affirmed to have been wrought at the Abbé's tomb, it appeareth from their own accounts, not only that they were gradual and slow, but that the persons on whom these cures were wrought, frequently suffered the most grievous and excessive pains and torments, and which they themselves represent to have been greater than ever they had felt before, or were able to express; and these pains often continued for several days together in the utmost extremity.† To which may be added, the violent agitations and convulsions, which became so usual on these occasions, that they came at length to be regarded as symptoms of the miraculous cures; though they could not be properly regarded in this view, since many of those who had those convulsions found no relief in their maladies, and even grew worse than before. They were frequently attended with strange contortions, sometimes frightful, sometimes ridiculous, and sometimes inconsistent with the rules of modesty and decency.‡ And accordingly they have been condemned by some of the most eminent Jansenist divines. In 1735 there was published at Paris a remarkable piece, intitled, *Consultation sur les Convulsions*, signed by thirty appellant doctors, men of great reputation among the Jansenists for learning, judgment, and probity; the greater part of whom had at first entertained favourable thoughts of those convulsions; and some of them had publicly declared them to be the work of God. But now they pronounced them to be unworthy of God, of his infinite majesty, wisdom, and goodness: They declared that it was a folly, a fanaticism, a scandal, and in one word, a blasphemy against God, to attribute to him these operations; and did not scruple to intimate, that they rendered the miraculous cures, to which they were pretended to be annexed, suspected. These doctors, who were called the *Consultants*, condemned all the convulsions in general. Others of the Jansenist divines, whom M. de Montgeron has distinguished by the title of the *Antiscouristes*, and whom he acknowledges to be among the most zealous appellants, and to be persons of great merit and eminence, though they did

* *Lettres sur les Miracles*. p. 258, 259, 386, 337.

† *Lettres sur les Miracles*, p. 339, & seq.

‡ Some of those that were seized with these convulsions, or pretended to be so, were guilty of the most extravagant follies. They pretended to prophesy, and uttered several predictions, which the event soon proved to be false. One of them went so far as to foretel, that the church-yard of St. Medard, which had been shut up by the King's order, should be opened, and that M. de Paris should appear in the church, in the presence of great numbers of people, on the first of May following. See this and other remarkable things relating to these convulsions, in M. Vernet's *Traité de la Vérité de la Religion Chrétienne*, sect. 7, chap. xxii. xxiii. And there cannot be a greater proof of the power of M. de Montgeron's prejudices, than that in the last edition of his book, in three volumes 4to. he has particularly applied himself to support and justify these convulsions.

not condemn all the convulsions, yet passed a very severe censure upon those of them which that gentleman looks upon to be the most extraordinary and miraculous of all. And with regard to these convulsions in general, it may be observed, that by the acknowledgment of the most skilful physicians, nervous affections have frequently produced strange symptoms; that they are often of a catching contagious nature, and easily communicated; and that they may be counterfeited by art. Many of those that were seized by M. Heraut, the Lieutenant of Police, acknowledged to him that they had counterfeited convulsions; in consequence of which there was an ordinance published by the King, January 27, 1732, for searching out and apprehending those impostors. And yet Mr. Hume has thought proper to represent it, as if M. Heraut, though he had full power to seize and examine the *witnesses*, and *subjects* of these miracles, *could never reach any thing satisfactory against them.*

These must be owned to be circumstances, which administer just grounds of suspicion, and which make a wide difference between the miracles pretended to have been wrought at the tomb of the Abbé de Paris, and those that were performed by our Saviour, and by the apostles in his name.

IV. The next observation I shall make is this; that several of the miracles ascribed to the Abbé, and which were pretended to be proved by many witnesses, were afterwards clearly convicted of falsehood and imposture; which brings a great discredit upon all the rest; whereas nothing of this kind can be alleged against the miracles by which Christianity was attested. The affair of Anne le Franc, of which some account was given above, shows, as M. Des Voeux justly observes, how little dependence is to be had upon informations in this cause directed by Jansenists. But this is not the only instance of this kind. They had published that La Dalmaix had been miraculously cured by the Abbe's intercession; and this was proved by a letter pretended to have been written by herself. And yet this pretended miraculous cure was afterwards denied by the person herself, by her mother, and all her sisters: and by a sentence of a court of judicature of May 17, 1737, a person was declared to be convicted of having forged that, and some other letters, under the name of Dalmaix.* The *Sieur le Doux* openly retracted the relation of a miracle said to have been wrought upon himself. M. Des Voeux gives several other instances of false miracles, published by the Jansenists, and afterwards acknowledged to be so.† Jean Nivet was represented, by decisive informations, as cured of his deafness, and yet it is certain that he was deaf after, as well as before. The record of the informations made by Mr. Thomassin is full of contradictions, which discover the falsehood and perjury of the principal actress, and of the only witness of the miracle, as the Archbishop of Sens has well proved: though many of these proofs are passed over in silence by M. le Gros, who undertook to answer him.‡ Some of the witnesses and persons con-

* Vernet ubi supra, cap. xxi.

† Lettres sur les Miracles, p. 171, et. seq. Critique Generale, p. 204, &c. 233, 234.

‡ Ibid. p. 242, 243.

cerned withdrew, to escape the search that was made for them, and to shun the examination and inquiry which the king had ordered ; and others, who had attested that they were cured by the intercession of the Abbe de Paris, afterwards retracted it. The certificates themselves, on which so great a stress is laid, tend in many instances to increase the suspicion against those facts, which they were designed to confirm. The very number of those certificates, many of which are nothing at all to the purpose, and serve only for show, are plain proofs of art and design. The manner of drawing up those certificates, and the relations of the miracles, and the style and form of expression, show, that the persons in whose names they are drawn had the assistance of persons of a capacity much superior to their own. Long pieces, in a correct style, and in perfect good order, were published under the name of mean and illiterate persons. M. le Gros owns, that the relation of Genevieve Colin was reformed as to the style, by a person whom she desired to do it. Thus they had it in their power, under pretence of reforming, to alter it, and got the simple person to sign the whole. Five witnesses in the case of Anne le Franc depose, that their certificates left with the notary were altered, falsified, and embellished with divers circumstances. Many of the relations which were at first published, and were not thought full enough, were afterwards suppressed, and do not appear in M. de Montgeron's collection ; and others more ample were substituted in their stead, and embellished with many striking circumstances, which were omitted in the first relation. Many of the witnesses in their depositions carry it farther than, according to their own account, they could have any certain knowledge. Some of them appear to have been surprized into their testimonies by false or imperfect representations ; and artifices were employed to procure certificates from physicians, without bringing the case fully before them, or suffering them fairly to examine it.

To all which it may be added, that there is great reason to suspect, that many poor people feigned maladies, and pretended to be cured, on purpose to procure the gifts and benefactions of others ; which many of them did to good advantage. It is well known, and has been often proved, that in the Romish church there have been instances of persons, who made a trade of feigning maladies, and pretending to be miraculously cured. Such a one was Catharine de Prés, who was afterwards convicted by her own confession ; of which Father Le Brun hath given a particular account, *Hist. Crit. des Prat. Superstit.* liv. ii. cap. 4. who hath also detected several other false miracles which had been believed by numbers of that church. And may we not reasonably suspect the same of many poor people who came to the tomb of the Abbé de Paris ? See all these things shown in M. Des Voeux's *Lettres sur les Miracles*, Letters V, VI. and especially in Letters VII. and VIII. of his *Critique Générale*, where he particularly examineth every one of the miracles produced by M. de Montgeron. It is his observation, that the more carefully we consider those relations, and compare them with the pieces that are designed to justify them, the more plainly

the falsehood of them appeareth. And accordingly he hath found out not merely a single contradiction, but numerous contradictions, in the relations of the several miracles, compared with the certificates, and the pieces produced in justification of them. And therefore he asks with good reason, what becomes of demonstrations built on such relations and such certificates? He very properly observes, that the falsity even of a small number of facts, which are pretended to be proved by certificates, that were collected by those who took pains to verify the miracles, are sufficient to discredit all others founded on such certificates.

If the same things could have been justly objected against the miracles recorded in the New Testament, Christianity, considering the other disadvantages it laboured under, could never have been established. But the case with regard to these miracles was very different. They were not indeed proved by certificates, which may be procured by art and management. The first publishers of the Christian religion did not go about to collect evidences and testimonies; nor was there any need of their doing so in facts that were publicly known, and the reality of which their enemies themselves were not able to deny. They acted with greater simplicity, and with an open confidence of truth. Their narrations are plain and artless; nor do they take pains to prepossess or influence the reader, either by artful insinuations, or too violent assertions; which our author mentions as a suspicious circumstance. Never were any of their enemies able to convict them of falsehood. Far from ever denying the facts they had witnessed, or withdrawing for fear of having those facts inquired into, as several did in the other case, they openly avowed those facts before the public tribunals, and before persons of the highest authority: they never varied in their testimony, but persisted in it with an unfainting constancy, and sealed it with their blood. And it gives no small weight to their testimony, that they witnessed for facts, which were designed to confirm a scheme of religion contrary to their own most rooted prejudices. Nor can it be alleged, that they were themselves divided about the reality and divinity of the miracles wrought by Christ and his apostles, much less that they rejected and condemned many of them as foolish, scandalous, and injurious to the Divine Majesty; which was the censure passed upon some of the extraordinary facts relating to the Abbe de Paris, by the most eminent Jansenist divines.

Finally, the last observation I shall make is this: that the miracles of our Saviour and his apostles appear to have been wrought for an end worthy of the divine wisdom and goodness. The declared design of them was to give an attestation to the divine mission of the most excellent person that ever appeared in the world, and to confirm the best scheme of religion that was ever published, the most manifestly conducive to the glory of God, and to the salvation of mankind. Here was an end worthy of God, and for which it was fit for him to interpose in the most extraordinary manner. Accordingly this religion, thus attested and confirmed, was established in the world, and soon triumphed over all opposition. All the power

of the adversary, civil or sacerdotal, could not put a stop to its progress, or to the wonderful works done in confirmation of it. The effects which followed, considering the amazing difficulties it had to struggle with, and the seeming weakness and meanness of the instruments made use of to propagate it, proved the reality of those miracles, and that the whole was carried on by a divine power. But if we turn our views on the other hand to the miracles pretended to have been wrought at the tomb of the Abbé de Paris, it doth not appear that they answered any valuable end. There has indeed been an end found out for them, *viz.* to give a testimony from heaven to the cause of the appellants. But we may justly conclude from the wisdom of God, that in that case it would have been so ordered, as to make it evident that this was the intention of them, and that he would have taken care that no opposition from them should prevail, to defeat the design for which he interposed in so extraordinary a manner. But this was far from being the case. Mr. Hume indeed tells us, that "no Jansenist was ever at a loss to account for the cessation of the miracles, when the church-yard was shut up by the king's edict. 'Twas the touch of the tomb which operated those extraordinary effects, and when no one could approach the tomb, no effect could be expected."* But supposing that the design of those extraordinary divine interpositions was to give a testimony from heaven to the cause of the appellants, it is absurd to imagine, that it would have been in the power of an earthly prince, by shutting up the tomb, to put a stop to the course of the miraculous operations, and to render the design of God of none effect.† It strengthens this, when it is farther considered, that the whole affair of these pretended miracles turned in the issue rather to the disadvantage of the cause it was designed to confirm. It hath been already observed, that some of the most eminent among the appellant doctors, and who were most zealously attached to that cause, were greatly scandalized at several of those miracles, and especially at the extraordinary convulsions which generally attended them. The censures they passed upon them gave occasion to bitter contentions, and mutual severe reproaches and accusations. Some of the Jansenist writers themselves complain, that whereas before there was an entire and perfect union and harmony among them, as if they had been all of one heart and soul, there have been since that time cruel divisions and animosities, so that those who were friends before became irreconcilable enemies.‡ And can it be imagined, that God would execute his designs in so imperfect a manner that he would exert his own divine power to give testimony to that cause, and yet do it in such a way as to weaken that cause instead of supporting it, to raise prejudices against it in the minds of enemies, instead of gain-

* Philosophical Essays, p. 206.

† M. de Montgeron indeed will not allow that the miraculous operations ceased at the shutting up of the tomb; but by the miraculous operations he principally understands the convulsions, which continued still to be carried on: but which many of the principal Jansenists were far from looking upon as tokens of a divine interposition.

‡ Crit. Gener. lettre v. p. 159. & seq.

ing them, and to divide and offend the friends of it, instead of confirming and uniting them? Upon the whole, with regard to the attestations given to Christianity, all was wise, consistent, worthy of God, and suited to the end for which it was designed. But the other is a broken, incoherent scheme, which cannot be reconciled to itself, nor made to consist with the wisdom and harmony of the divine proceedings. The former therefore is highly credible, though the latter is not so.

The several considerations which have been mentioned do each of them singly, much more all of them together, show such signal differences between the miracles recorded in the gospels and those ascribed to the Abbe de Paris, that it must argue a peculiar degree of confidence to pretend to run a parallel between the one and the other, much more to affirm, as Mr. Hume has done, that the latter *much surpass* the former in *credit and authority*. This only shows how gladly these gentlemen would lay hold on any pretence to invalidate the evidences of Christianity. Thus, Mr. Chubb, in a discourse he published on miracles, in which he pretends impartially to represent the reasonings on both sides, produced with great pomp a pretended miracle wrought in the Cevennes in 1703, and represented it as of equal credit with those of the gospel. M. le Moyne, in his answer to him, hath evinced the falsehood of that story in a manner that admits of no reply :* and yet it is not improbable, that some future deist may see fit some time or other to revive that story, and oppose it to the miracles recorded in the New Testament.

Mr. Hume concludes his Essay with applauding his own performance, and is the better pleased with the *way of reasoning* he has made use of, as he thinks, "it may serve to confound those dangerous friends, or disguised enemies to the Christian religion, who have undertaken to defend it by the principles of human reason. Our most holy religion," saith he, "is founded on faith, not on reason :† and it is a sure method of exposing it, to put it to such a trial, as it is by no means fitted to endure." And he calls those,

* Le Moyne on Miracles, p. 422, &c.

† This author, who takes care to make the principles of his philosophy subservient to his designs against religion, in the fifth of his Philosophical Essays, where he undertakes to treat of the nature of belief, gives such an account of it as seems to exclude reason from any share in it at all. He makes the difference between *faith* and *fiction* to consist wholly in some sentiment of feeling, which is annexed to the former, not to the latter : That the sentiment of belief is nothing but the conception of an object more lively and forcible, more intense and steady than what attends the mere fiction of the imagination ; and that this manner of conception arises from the customary conjunction of the object with something present to the memory or senses. See his Philosophical Essays, p. 80—84. This gentleman is here, as in many other places, sufficiently obscure, nor is it easy to form a distinct notion of what he intends. But his design seems to be to exclude reason or the understanding from having any thing to do with belief, as if reason never had any influence in producing, directing, or regulating it ; which is to open a wide door to enthusiasm. But this is contrary to what we may all observe, and frequently experience. We in several cases clearly perceive, that we have reason to regard some things as fictitious, and others as true and real. And the reasons which show the difference between a fiction and a reality show, that we ought in reason to believe the one and not the other ; and so reason may go before the sentiment of belief, and lay a just foundation for it, and be instrumental to produce it. And in this case the belief may be said to be strictly rational.

who undertake to defend religion by reason, *pretended Christians*.* Such a mean and ungenerous sneer is below animadversion; all that can be gathered from it is, that these gentlemen are very uneasy at the attempts which have been made to defend Christianity in a way of reason and argument. They, it seems, are mightily concerned for *the preservation* of our holy faith, and in their great friendship for that cause would give it up as indefensible. And if the best way of befriending the Christian religion be to endeavour to subvert the evidences by which it is established, our author hath taken effectual care to convince the world of his friendly intentions towards it. As to the brief hints he hath given towards the end of his Essay against the Mosaic history, and the miracles recorded there, I shall not here take any notice of them, both because Mr. Adams hath clearly and succinctly obviated them, in his answer to that Essay, p. 88—94, and because I shall have occasion to resume this subject, when I come to make observations on Lord Bolingbroke's Posthumous Works, who hath with great virulence and bitterness used his utmost efforts to expose the Mosaic writings.

LETTER XX.

Additional Observations relating to Mr. Hume.—A Transcript of an ingenious Paper, containing an Examination of Mr. Hume's Arguments in his *Essay on Miracles*.—Observations upon it.—The Evidence of Matters of Fact may be so circumstanced as to produce a full Assurance.—Mr. Hume artfully confounds the Evidence of past Facts with the Probability of the future.—We may be certain of a matter of Fact after it hath happened, though it might before-hand seem very improbable that it would happen.—Where full Evidence is given of a Fact, there must not always be a Deduction made on the Account of its being unusual and extraordinary.—There is strong and positive Evidence of the Miracles wrought in Attestation of Christianity, and no Evidence against them.—The miraculous Nature of the Facts no Proof that the Facts were not done.—A Summary of Mr. Hume's Argument against the Evidence of Miracles.—The Weakness of it shown.—Considering the vast Importance of Religion to our Happiness, the bare Possibility of its being true should be sufficient to engage our Compliance.

SIR,

THE four preceding letters comprehend all the observations that were made upon Mr. Hume in the second volume of the "View of the Deistical Writers," 8vo. edit. But soon after that volume was published, I received a letter from a gentleman of sense and learning, which particularly relates to that part of it which was designed in answer to Mr. Hume. He was pleased to say it gave him *uncommon satisfaction*, and at the same time sent me a paper which he seemed to be very well pleased with, that had been drawn up by a young gentleman, then lately dead. It was designed as a confutation

* Philosophical Essays, p. 204, 205.

of Mr. Hume upon his own principles, which he thought had not been sufficiently attended to in the answers that had been made to that writer; and he allowed me, if I should be of opinion that any thing in it might be serviceable to a farther confutation of Mr. Hume, to make use of his sentiments either by way of note or appendix, as I should judge most convenient. I returned an answer, in a letter which I shall here insert, as it containeth some reflections that may be of advantage in relation to the controversy with Mr. Hume; but first it will be proper to lay before the reader the paper itself here referred to, which is concisely drawn, and runs thus :—

AN EXAMINATION OF MR. HUME'S ARGUMENTS
IN HIS
ESSAY ON MIRACLES.

THE objects of human understanding may be distinguished either into propositions asserting the relation between general ideas, or matters of fact.

In the former kind we can arrive at certainty, by means of a faculty in our souls, which perceives this relation either instantly or intimately, which is called Intuition, or else by intermediate ideas, which called Demonstration.

But we can only form a judgment of the latter by experience. No reasoning *a priori* will discover to us, that water will suffocate, or the fire consume us, or that the loadstone will attract steel; and therefore no judgment can be made concerning the truth or falsehood of matters of fact, but what is constantly regulated by custom and experience, and can therefore never go higher than probability.

When we have frequently observed a particular event to happen in certain circumstances, the mind naturally makes an induction, that it will happen again in the same circumstances. When this observation has been long, constant, and uninterrupted, there our belief that it will happen again approaches infinitely near to certainty. Thus no man has the least doubt of the sun's rising to-morrow, or that the tide will ebb and flow at its accustomed periods; but where our observations are broken upon by frequent interruptions and exceptions to the contrary, then we expect such an event with the least degree of assurance; and in all intermediate cases, our expectations are always in proportion to the constancy and regularity of the experience.

This method of reasoning is not connected by any medium or change of steps, but is plainly to be observed in all animate beings, brutes as well as men.* And it would be as absurd to ask a reason, why we expect to happen again, that which has regularly come to pass a great many times before, as it is to inquire, why the mind perceives a relation between certain ideas.

* May not the long sought after distinction between brutes and men consist in this : That whereas the human understanding comprehends both classes, the brutal sagacity is confined only to matters of fact?

They are both distinct faculties of the soul; and as it has been authorized by some writers of distinction, to give the denomination of sense to the internal as well as external perceptions, the one may be called the *speculative*, and the other the *probable sense*.

From this last-mentioned principle Mr. Hume has deduced an argument to show, that there is great improbability against the belief of any miraculous fact, how well soever attested; and as religion may seem to be greatly affected by this conclusion (supposing it to be true), before we come directly to consider the argument, it may not be amiss to inquire how far religion, as a practical institution, may be concerned therein.

And for this purpose it is to be observed, that probable evidence for the truth or falsehood of any matter of fact differs essentially from demonstration, in that the former admits of degrees, in the greatest variety, from the highest moral certainty down to the lowest presumption; which the latter does not.

Let it also be further observed, that probable evidence is in its nature but an imperfect kind of information, the highest degree of which can never reach absolute certainty, or full proof; and yet to mankind, with regard to their practice, it is in many cases the very guide of their lives.

Most of our actions are determined by the highest degrees of probability; as for instance, what we do in consequence of the sun's rising to-morrow; of the seasons regularly succeeding one another; and that certain kinds of meat and drink will nourish. Others are determined by lesser degrees. Thus rhubarb does not always purge; nor is opium a soporific to every person that takes it; and yet for all that they are of constant use for these purposes in medicine. In all cases of moment, when to act or forbear may be attended with considerable damage, no wise man makes the least scruple of doing what he apprehends may be of advantage to him, even though the thing was doubtful, and one side of the question as supportable as the other; but in matters of the utmost consequence, a prudent man will think himself obliged to take notice even of the lowest probability, and will act accordingly. A great many instances might be given in the common pursuits of life, where a man would be considered as out of his senses, who would not act, and with great diligence and application too, not only upon an over-chance, but even where the probability might be greatly against his success.

Suppose a criminal under sentence of death were promised a pardon, if he threw twelve with a pair of dice at one throw; here the probability is thirty-six to one against him, and yet he would be looked upon as mad if he did not try. Nothing in such a case would hinder a man from trying, but the absolute impossibility of the event.

Let us now apply this method of reasoning to the practice of religion. And supposing the arguments against miracles were far more probable than the evidence for them, yet the vast importance of religion to our happiness in every respect would still be very sufficient to recommend it to the practice of every prudent man; and

the bare possibility that it might prove true, were there nothing else to support it, would engage his assent and compliance; or else he must be supposed to act differently in this respect to what he generally does in all the other concerns of his life. So that whether Mr. Hume's reasonings be true or false, religion has still sufficient evidence to influence the practice of every wise and considerate man.

This being premised, let us now proceed to consider Mr. Hume's arguments. His reasoning may be briefly expressed in this manner: We have had a long, universal, and uninterrupted experience, that no events have happened contrary to the course of nature, from constant and unvaried observations; we have therefore a full proof, that the uniform course has not been broke in upon, nor will be, by any particular exceptions. But the observation of truth depending upon, and constantly following human testimony, is by no means universal and uninterrupted, and therefore it does not amount to a full proof, that it either has, or will follow it in any particular instance. And therefore the proof arising from any human testimony can never equal the proof that is deduced against a miracle from the very nature of the fact.

This I take to be a full and fair state of this gentleman's reasoning.

But the answer is very plain; if by human testimony he would mean the evidence of any one single man indifferently taken, then indeed his second proposition would be true; but then the conclusion will by no means follow from it; but if by human testimony he would understand the evidence of any collection of men, then the second proposition is false, and consequently the conclusion must be so too.

That twelve honest persons should combine to assert a falsehood, at the hazard of their lives, without any view to private interest, and with the certain prospect of losing every thing that is and ought to be dear to mankind in this world, is, according to his own way of reasoning, as great a miracle, to all intents and purposes, as any interruption in the common course of nature; because no history has ever mentioned any such thing, nor has any man in any age ever had experience of such a fact.

But here it may be objected, that though it be allowed to be as great a miracle for twelve honest men to attest a falsehood, contrary to their plain interest in every respect, as that any alteration should happen in the common course of nature, yet these evidences being equal, they only destroy one another, and still leave the mind in suspense.

This objection draws all its force from Mr. Hume's assertion, that an uniform and uninterrupted experience amounts to a full proof, which when examined will not be found true; and indeed I wonder that a writer of his accuracy should venture on such an expression, since it is confessed on all hands, that all our reasonings concerning matters of fact ever fall short of certainty, or full proof.

And besides, the very same objection which he makes against the veracity of human testimony, to weaken its authenticity, may be re-

concerning it, and produceth a full assurance. And that this is often the case with relation to matters of fact cannot reasonably be denied. The words *sure* and *certain* are frequently applied in common language to things of this kind, and, for aught I can see, very properly. And in the best and exactest writers, it is often described under the term of *moral certainty*, an expression which this gentleman himself makes use of.* And it is a great mistake to imagine, that the word *moral* in that case is always used as a term of diminution, as if it were not to be entirely depended upon. It is only designed to show that this certainty is of a different kind, and proceedeth upon different grounds, from that which ariseth from demonstration; but yet it may produce as strong an assurance in the mind, and which may undoubtedly be depended upon. That there was a war carried on in England in the last century between King and Parliament, I only know by human testimony. But will any man say that for that reason I cannot be sure of it? Many cases might be mentioned with regard to matters of fact which we know, by human testimony, the evidence of which is so strong and convincing, that we can no more reasonably doubt of it, than of the truth of any proposition which comes to us demonstrated by the strictest reasoning. Mr. Hume himself seems sensible, that it would be wrong to say, that every thing which is not matter of demonstration comes only under the notion of probability. And therefore, though he frequently seems to class all matters of fact under the head of probabilities, yet, in the beginning of his *Essay on Probability*, he seems to find fault with Mr. Locke for dividing all arguments into *demonstrative* and *probable*; and observes, that to conform our language more to common use, we should divide arguments into *demonstrations*, *proofs*, and *probabilities*; where he seems to place what he calls *proofs*, which he explains to be such arguments from experience as leave no room for doubt or opposition, in a higher class than probabilities. And Mr. Locke himself, though he seems to confine certainty to demonstration, yet allows concerning some probabilities arising from human testimony, that "they rise so near to certainty, that they govern our thoughts as absolutely, and influence our actions as fully, as the most evident demonstration; and in what concerns us, we make little or no difference between them and certain knowledge. Our belief thus grounded rises to assurance."† And in that case I think probability is too low a word, and not sufficiently expressive, or properly applicable to

* The ingenious gentleman seems to grant what may be sufficient, when he saith, that probability "in some cases approaches infinitely near to certainty." If it be allowed, that matter of fact may be so certain, that the mind may be fully assured of it, and so as to leave no room for a reasonable doubt, this is all that is really necessary in the present controversy. And this is what Mr. Hume himself seems sometimes to allow. But at other times, he gives such an account of human testimony as tends to render it in all cases uncertain. And the design of his representing it as never rising higher than probability, seems to be to convey an idea of uncertainty and doubt as inseparably attending all human testimony. And to guard against the wrong use that may be made of this, is the design of what I have here observed.

† *Essay on Human Understanding*, book iv. chap. xv. sect 6.

things of this kind. For according to Mr. Locke's account of it, and the common usage of the word, that it is said to be probable which is likely to be true, and of which we have no certainty, but only *some inducements*, as Mr. Locke speaks, to believe and receive them as true.

Another thing observable in Mr. Hume's reasoning on this subject is, that in treating of probability or the evidence of facts, which he foundeth wholly upon experience, he confoundeth the evidence of past facts with that of the future; and the young gentleman himself seems not sufficiently to distinguish them. The instances he produceth to show, that the judgments which the mind forms concerning the probability of events *will always be in proportion to the constancy and regularity of the experience*, all relate to the probability of future events from the experience of the past. But the question about the probability of any future fact hath properly nothing to do in the present controversy between Mr. Hume and his adversaries, which relateth wholly to the evidence of past facts; and it is only an instance of this writer's art, that, by confounding these different questions, he may perplex the debate, and throw dust in the eyes of his readers. It will be granted, that with relation to future facts or events, the utmost evidence we can attain to from past observation or experience is a high degree of probability; but with relation to past matters of fact, we may in many cases arrive at a certainty, or what Mr. Hume calls a full proof; yea, it often happens, that the evidence of past facts may be so circumstanced, that we may be certain that such an event really came to pass, though, if the question had been put before the event, the probability from past experience would have been greatly against it. Nothing therefore can be more weak and fallacious than Mr. Hume's reasoning, when from this principle of forming conclusions concerning future events from past experience, he endeavours to deduce an argument against the belief of any miraculous fact, how well soever attested. For though, if the question were concerning a future miracle in any particular instance, if we should judge merely from past experience, the probability might seem to lie against it; yet if the question be concerning a past miraculous fact, there may be such proof of it, as may not leave room for a reasonable doubt that the miracle was really done, though before it was done it might seem highly improbable that it would be done.

Another fallacy Mr. Hume is guilty of, is his supposing that in all cases where the fact, in itself considered, is unusual, and out of the way of common experience, whatever be the evidence given for it, there must still be a deduction made, and the assent given to it is always weakened in proportion to the unusualness of the fact. Now this doth not always hold. A fact of an extraordinary nature may come to us confirmed by an evidence so strong, as to produce a full and undoubted assurance of its having been done; and in such a case there is no deduction to be made; nor is the assent we give to the truth of the fact at all weakened on the account of its being

unusual and extraordinary. Thus e. g. that a great king should be openly put to death by his own subjects, upon a pretended formal trial before a court of judicature, is very unusual, and before it came to pass would have appeared highly improbable; but after it happened, there is such evidence of the fact as to produce a full assurance that it was really done; and the man who should go about seriously to make a doubt of it, and make a formal deduction from the credit of the evidence, on the account of the strangeness of the fact, and should pretend that we must believe it with an assent only proportioned to the evidence which remaineth after that deduction, would, under pretence of extraordinary accuracy, only render himself ridiculous. It will indeed be readily owned, that more and greater evidence may be justly required with regard to a thing that is unusual and out of the common course, than is required for a common fact; but when there is evidence given sufficient to satisfy the mind, its being unusual and extraordinary ought not to be urged as a reason for not giving a full credit to it, or for pretending that the testimony concerning it is not to be depended upon. For the evidence for a fact out of the course of common observation and experience may be so circumstanced, as to leave no room for the least reasonable doubt; and the assent to it may be as strong and firm as to any the most common and ordinary event; nor is any thing in that case to be deducted from the credit of the evidence, under pretence of the fact's being unusual or even miraculous.

You will allow me on this occasion to take notice of a passage in your letter, in which, after having observed that Mr. Hume had studied the point about probability, and treated upon it with great accuracy, you give it as your opinion, that "the best way of answering him would be in the way himself has chalked out, by comparing the degrees of probability in the evidence on both sides, and deducting the inferior." Here you seem to suppose, that there is evidence on both sides in the case of miracles, and that, upon balancing the evidence, that which hath the higher degrees of probability ought to be preferred, at the same time making a deduction from it in proportion to the weight of the contrary evidence. But the supposition you here proceed upon appears to me to be a wrong one, viz. that in the case in question there is evidence on both sides, and consequently an opposition of evidence, *i. e.* evidence against the miracles wrought in proof of Christianity, as well as evidence for them. There is indeed positive strong evidence on one side, to show that those facts were really done; an evidence drawn from testimony so circumstantiated, that it hath all the qualifications which could be reasonably desired to render it full and satisfactory.* But what evidence is there on the other side? No counter-evidence or testimony to show the falsehood of this is pretended by Mr. Hume to be produced; nor are there any circumstances mentioned, attending the evidence itself, which may justly tend to render it suspicious. Nothing is opposed to it but the

* See this fully shown in answer to Mr. Hume, p. 206, and seq.

miraculous nature of the facts, or their being contrary to the usual course of nature; and this cannot properly be said to be any evidence to prove that the facts were not done, or that the testimony given to them was false. Nor needs there any deduction to be made in the assent we give to such a full and sufficient testimony as is here supposed, on that account; because, as the case was circumstanced, it was proper that those facts should be beyond and out of the common course of nature and experience; and it was agreeable to the wisdom of God, and to the excellent ends for which those facts were designed, that they should be so; since otherwise they would not have answered the intention, which was to give a divine attestation to an important revelation of the highest use and benefit to mankind.

It is an observation of the ingenious author of the paper you sent me, "That twelve honest persons should combine to assert a falsehood, at the hazard of their lives, without any view to private interest, and with the certain prospect of losing every thing that is and ought to be dear to mankind in this world, is, according to Mr. Hume's own way of reasoning, as great a miracle, to all intents and purposes, as any interruption in the common course of nature." But then he observes, that the thing these witnesses are supposed to attest being also a miracle, contrary to the usual course of nature, it may be objected, that these evidences being equal, they only destroy one another, and still leave the mind in suspense. The answer he gives to this does not seem to me to be sufficiently clear. He first observes, that "this objection draws all its force from Mr. Hume's assertion, that an uniform and uninterrupted experience is a full proof, which when examined will not be found true, because it is confessed on all hands, that all our reasonings concerning matters of fact ever fall short of certainty, or full proof." But besides that this doth not always hold, since it has been shewn, that our reasonings concerning matters of fact may in some cases amount to such a certainty as may be justly called a full proof, it may still be urged, that an uniform uninterrupted experience, though not strictly a full proof, yet is such a proof against a miracle as is able to counterbalance the evidence for it; in which case the objection still holds, and the mind is kept in suspense. And the gentleman himself seems afterwards to grant, that a fact's being contrary to the usual course of nature affordeth such a proof against it from the nature of the thing, as is sufficient to counterpoise the evidence of twelve such witnesses as are supposed, though he thinks it would not do so, if the number of witnesses were doubled; and that this shews that the proof against a miracle arising from the nature of the fact may be exceeded by contrary human testimony, which is what Mr. Hume denies. And he argues, that if we suppose the testimony of twelve persons for a miracle to be just equal to the evidence arising from the nature of the thing against it, and that we have the evidence of twenty for any particular miracle recorded in the Gospel, then subtracting the weaker evidence from the stronger, we shall have a surplus of the positive testimony of eight persons, without any thing to oppose it.

I am persuaded, that the design of the ingenious gentleman, in putting the case after this manner, was to signify it as his real opinion, that the testimony of twelve such witnesses as are here supposed, in proof of a miracle's having been really wrought, did not more than countervail the argument against it arising from the strangeness of the fact; but he had a mind to put the case as strongly as he could in favour of Mr. Hume, and yet to show, that there might still be an excess of proof, according to his own account, on the side of miracles; which destroys his main hypothesis, that the evidence for a miracle can never exceed the evidence against it. It appears to me however, that this is making too large a concession, and that it is not the properest way of putting the case. It proceedeth upon the supposition, which hath been already shown to be a wrong one, that a thing's being miraculous, or contrary to the usual course of nature, is alone in all circumstances a proper *proof* or *evidence* against the truth of the fact; whereas the case may be so circumstanced, that the miraculousness of the fact is in reality no *proof* or *evidence* against it at all. It will indeed be acknowledged, as was before hinted, that greater evidence is required with regard to a fact which is miraculous, than for any fact in the common and ordinary course. But when such evidence is given, to prove that a miraculous fact was really done, as is suitable to the importance of the fact, and which cannot be rejected without admitting suppositions which are manifestly absurd; in such a case, a thing's being miraculous is no just reason for not giving a full assent to the testimony concerning it. For its being miraculous, in the case that hath been put, hath nothing in it absurd or incredible; whereas that twelve men of sound minds and honest characters should combine to attest a falsehood, in opposition to all their worldly interests and prejudices, and to every principle that can be supposed to influence human nature, without any assignable cause for such a conduct (which has been shown to be the case with regard to the witnesses for Christianity), is absolutely absurd, nor can in any way be accounted for. As to the pretence, that in this case there is a miracle on both sides, and that the one is to be opposed to the other, and destroys its evidence; this sophism, which has imposed upon many, and in which the chief strength of Mr. Hume's essay lies, deriveth its whole force from an abuse of the word miracle, and a confounding, as this writer hath artfully done, a miracle and an absurdity, as if it were the same thing. That twelve men should, in the circumstances supposed, combine to attest a falsehood, at the hazard of their lives and of every thing dear to men, cannot properly be called a miracle, according to any definition that can be reasonably given of a miracle, or even according to Mr. Hume's own definition of a miracle, that "it is a transgression of a law of nature by a particular volition of the Deity, or by the interposal of some invisible agent;" but is a manifest absurdity. But in the case of an extraordinary event, contrary to the usual course of natural causes, and wrought for a very valuable purpose, and by a power adequate to the effect, there is indeed a proper miracle, but no absurdity at all.

It is true, that its being unusual and out of the ordinary course of observation and experience, is a good reason for not believing it without a strong and convincing evidence, a much stronger evidence than would be necessary in common and ordinary facts. But when there is an evidence of its having actually been done, which hath all the requisites that can be justly demanded in such a case, and at the same time sufficient reasons are assigned, worthy of the divine wisdom and goodness, to show that it was proper to be done, its being unusual and extraordinary is no proof at all that it hath not been done, nor can in any propriety of language be called an *evidence* against it; and therefore no subtraction is to be made from the credit given to such a supposed full and sufficient evidence merely on this account. Perhaps my meaning will be better understood, by applying it to a particular instance; and I choose to mention that which is the principal miracle in proof of Christianity, our Lord's resurrection. The fact itself was evidently miraculous, and required a divine power to accomplish it. It was therefore necessary, in order to lay a just foundation for believing it, that there should be such an evidence given as was proportioned to the importance and extraordinariness of the fact. And that the evidence which was given of it was really such an evidence, appears, I think, plainly from what I have elsewhere observed concerning it.* But if we should put the case thus: that not only was the fact extraordinary in itself, and out of the common course of nature, but the evidence given of it was insufficient, and not to be depended upon, and had circumstances attending it which brought it under a just suspicion: or, if contrary evidence was produced to invalidate it; e. g. if the soldiers that watched the sepulchre, instead of pretending that the body of Jesus was stolen away whilst they were asleep, which was no evidence at all, and was a plain acknowledgment that they knew nothing at all of the matter, had declared that the disciples came with a powerful band of armed men, and overpowered the guard, and carried away the body; or, if any of the Jews had averred, that they were present and awake when the soldiers slept, and that they saw the disciples carry away the body; or, if any of the disciples to whom Jesus appeared, and who professed to have seen and conversed with him after his resurrection, had afterwards declared, that they were among the disciples at those times when he was pretended to have appeared, and that they saw no such appearances, nor heard any such conversations as were pretended. On this supposition, it might be properly said that there was evidence given on both sides, viz. for and against Christ's resurrection, and consequently that there was a real opposition of evidence; in which case it would be necessary carefully to examine the evidences, and compare them one with another, in order to judge which of them deserved the greater credit, and how far one of them weakened or impaired the force of the other. But as the case was circumstanced, since there was a very strong positive evidence given, that Christ really rose from the dead, and showed himself alive after his resur-

* See above, p. 202, and seq.

rection by many infallible proofs, and no contrary evidence produced against it, nor any thing alleged to render the evidence that was given of it justly suspected; and since there are also very good reasons assigned, worthy of the divine wisdom and goodness, which rendered it highly proper that Christ should be raised from the dead; on this view of the case, the extraordinariness of the fact, alone considered, cannot properly be called an *evidence* against the truth of it, nor be justly urged as a reason for not yielding a full assent to the evidence concerning it; for it was necessary to the ends proposed by the divine wisdom, that the fact should be of an extraordinary and miraculous nature; and if it had not been so, it would not have answered those ends. I think therefore it may justly be affirmed, that, taking the case in all its circumstances, considering the great strength and force of the evidence that is given for the fact, and the many concurring proofs and attestations by which it was confirmed, together with the excellent and important ends for which it was designed, there is as just ground to believe that Christ rose again from the dead, as that he was crucified; though the latter be a fact not out of the ordinary course of nature, and the former was evidently so. And here it may not be improper to mention a remarkable observation of Mr. Locke. He had, in giving an account of the grounds of probability, supposed one ground of it to be the conformity of a thing with *our own knowledge, observation, and experience*; and after taking notice of several things to this purpose, he observes, that "though common experience and the ordinary course of things have justly a mighty influence on the minds of men, to make them give or refuse credit to any thing proposed to their belief, yet there is one case wherein the strangeness of the fact lessens not the assent to a fair testimony given of it; for where such supernatural events are suitable to ends aimed at by him who has the power to change the course of nature; there under such circumstances they may be fitter to procure belief, by how much the more they are beyond or contrary to common observation. This is the proper case of miracles, which, well attested, do not only find credit themselves, but give it also to other truths which need such a confirmation."*

Thus this great master of reason is so far from thinking with Mr. Hume, that a thing's being miraculous, or beyond the common course of observation and experience, absolutely destroys all evidence of testimony that can be given concerning the truth of the fact, that in his opinion it doth not so much as lessen the assent given to it upon a fair testimony; provided the supernatural facts thus attested were suitable to the ends of the divine wisdom and goodness, *i. e.* wrought in attestation to a revelation of the highest importance, and of the most excellent tendency; and that in that case the more evidently miraculous the fact is, the fitter it is to answer the end proposed by it.

The ingenious author of the paper you sent me has very properly summed up Mr. Hume's argument against the evidence of miracles,

* Locke's Essay on Human Understanding, book iv. chap. xvi. sec. 13.

thus: We have had a long, universal, and uninterrupted experience, that no events have happened contrary to the course of nature, from constant and unvaried observations. We have therefore a full proof, that this uniform course has not been broken in upon, nor will be, by any particular exceptions.

But the observation of truth depending upon, and constantly following human testimony, is by no means universal and uninterrupted; and therefore it does not amount to a full proof, that it either has or will follow in any particular instance.

And therefore the proof arising from any human testimony, can never equal the proof that is deduced against a miracle from the very nature of the fact.

This he takes to be a full and fair state of Mr. Hume's reasoning; and it appears to me to be so. And he says, "The answer is plain. If by human testimony he would mean of any one single man indifferently taken, then his second proposition would be true; but then the conclusion would by no means follow from it: but if by human testimony he would understand the evidence of any collection of men, then the second proposition is false, and consequently the conclusion is so too."

This answer relateth only to the second proposition.* But it might have been said, that neither of the propositions are to be depended upon, and that they are utterly insufficient to support the conclusion he would draw from them. For as to the first proposition, it assumes the very point in question; it affirms, that no events have ever happened contrary to the course of nature; and that this we know by a long, universal, and uninterrupted experience. If this be meant universal and uninterrupted experience of all mankind in all ages, which alone can be of any force in the present argument, how doth it appear that we know by universal and uninterrupted experience, that no such events have ever happened! Are there not several events of this kind recorded by credible testimonies to have happened? The whole argument then is upon a wrong foundation. It proceedeth upon an universal and uninterrupted experience, not broken in upon in any instance. And there is good testimony to prove, that it hath been broken in upon in several instances. And if it hath been broken in upon in any instances, no argument can be brought from experience to prove that it hath not, or may not be broken in upon; and so the whole reasoning falls. If it be alleged, that these testimonies, or indeed any testimonies at all, ought not to be admitted in this case, the question returns, for what reason ought they not to be admitted? If the reason be, as it must be according to Mr. Hume, because there is an universal uninterrupted experience

* Though the ingenious gentleman hath not directly and formally answered the first proposition, yet he hath plainly shown that he doth not admit it, when he saith, that "the very same objection Mr. Hume makes against the veracity of human testimony, to weaken its authenticity, may be retorted with equal force against his unvaried certainty of the course of nature. And that doubtless the many approved histories we have relating to miracles, will as much lessen the probability of what he calls a full proof on his side of the question, as all the forgeries and falsehoods that are brought to discredit human testimony will weaken it on the other."

against them, this is to take it for granted, that no such events have ever happened ; for if there have been any instances of such events, the experience is not universal and uninterrupted. So that we see what the boasted argument against miracles from uniform experience comes to. It in effect comes to this, that no such events have ever happened, because no such events have ever happened.

As to the second proposition, though if we speak of human testimony in general, it will be easily allowed, that it is not to be absolutely and universally depended upon ; yet, as hath been already hinted, it may in particular instances be so circumstanced, as to yield a satisfying assurance, or what may not improperly be called a full proof. Even the testimony of a particular person may in some cases be so circumstanced, as to leave no room for reasonable suspicion or doubt. But especially if we speak of what this gentleman calls *a collection of men*, this may in some cases be so strong, as to produce a full and entire conviction, however improbable the attested fact might otherwise appear to be. And therefore if we meet with any testimonies relating to particular events of an extraordinary nature, they are not immediately to be rejected, under pretence of their being contrary to past experience ; but we must carefully examine the evidence brought for them, whether it be of such a kind as to make it reasonable for us to believe them ; and that the evidence brought for miraculous facts recorded in the gospel are of this kind hath been often clearly shown.

The only farther reflection I shall make on this gentleman's paper is, that it contains good and proper observations concerning our being determined in matters of practice by probabilities ; that in all cases of moment, where to act or forbear may be attended with considerable damage, no wise man makes the least scruple of doing what he apprehends may be of advantage to him, even though the thing were doubtful ; but in matters of the utmost consequence, a prudent man will think himself obliged to take notice of the lowest probability, and will act accordingly. This he applies to the practice of religion, and observes, that considering the vast importance of religion to our happiness in every respect, the bare possibility that it might prove true, were there nothing else to support it, would engage his assent and compliance ; or else he must be supposed to act differently in this respect to what he generally does in all the other concerns of his life.

This observation is not entirely new, but it is handsomely illustrated by this gentleman, and seems very proper to show, that those who neglect and despise religion, do in this, notwithstanding their boasted pretences, act contrary to the plain dictates of reason and good sense. But we need not have recourse to this supposition. The evidence on the side of religion is vastly superior. And if this be the case, no words can sufficiently express the folly and unreasonableness of their conduct, who take up with slight prejudices and presumptions in opposition to it ; and by choosing *darkness rather than light*, and rejecting the *great salvation* offered in the gospel, run

the utmost hazard of exposing themselves to a heavy condemnation and punishment.

Thus I have taken the liberty you allowed me of giving my thoughts upon the paper you sent me. I cannot but look upon the young gentleman's attempt to be a laudable and ingenious one, though there are some things in his way of managing the argument, which seem not to have been thoroughly considered, and which, I am satisfied, he would have altered, if he had lived to take an accurate review of the subject.

This, with a few additions since made to it, is the substance of the answer I returned to the worthy gentleman who had written to me, and which I have here inserted, because there are some things in it that may tend to the farther illustration of what I had offered in my remarks on Mr. Hume's "Essay on Miracles." My next will contain some additional observations relating to the Abbé de Paris, and the miracles attributed to him; together with reflections on some passages in Mr. Hume's "Enquiry concerning the Principles of Morals," which seem to be intended to expose Christianity.

LETTER XXI.

Some Reflections on the extraordinary Sanctity ascribed to the Abbé de Paris.—He carried Superstition to a strange excess, and by his extraordinary Austerities voluntarily hastened his own Death.—His Character and course of Life, of a different kind from that rational and solid Piety and Virtue which is recommended in the Gospel.—Observations on some Passages in Mr. Hume's *Enquiry concerning the Principles of Morals*.—He reckons *Self-denial*, *Mortification*, and *Humility* among the Monkish Virtues, and represents them as not only useless, but as having a bad Influence on the Temper and Conduct.—The Nature of Self-denial explained, and its great Usefulness and Excellence shown.—What is to be understood by the Mortification required by the Gospel.—This also is a reasonable and necessary Part of our Duty.—Virtue, according to Mr. Hume, hath nothing to do with Sufferance.—But by the Acknowledgment of the wisest Moralists, one important Office of it is to support and bear us up under Adversity.—The Nature of Humility explained.—It is an excellent and amiable Virtue.

SIR,

THE miracles of the Abbé de Paris have made so great a noise in the world, and so much advantage hath been taken of them by the enemies of Christianity, and particularly by Mr. Hume, that I thought it necessary to consider them pretty largely above in the nineteenth Letter. Some things have occurred since, which have some relation to that matter, and which I shall here take notice of.

In that Letter, p. 258, mention is made of the high opinion the people had conceived of the Abbé's extraordinary sanctity, as what tended very much to raise their expectations of miracles to be

is appealing, as with his dying breath, to a future general council against the constitution *Unigenitus*, procured him so extraordinary a reputation, that he has passed for one of the greatest saints that ever appeared in the Christian church. No sooner was he dead, but an innumerable multitude of people ran to his corpse, some of whom kissed his feet, others cut off part of his hair as a remedy against all manner of evil; others brought books or bits of cloth to touch his body, as believing it filled with a divine virtue. Thus were they prepared to believe and expect the most wonderful things.

Whosoever impartially considers the several things that have been mentioned, and which are amply verified in the places referred to in the margin,* will not think the learned Mosheim in the wrong, when he pronounceth, that it cannot in consistency with reason be supposed, that God should extraordinarily interpose by his own divine power, to do honour to the bones and ashes of a man weak and superstitious to a degree of folly, and who was knowingly and wilfully accessory to his own death. In vain do his admirers, as he himself had done, extol his thus destroying himself as an offering up himself a voluntary sacrifice to divine justice. If a man should under the same pretence dispatch himself at once with a pistol or poniard, would this be thought a proper justification of his conduct? And yet I see not why the pretence might not as well hold in the one case as in the other; since it makes no great difference, whether the death was swifter or slower, provided it was brought on with a deliberate intention and design.

How different is this from the beautiful and noble idea of piety and virtue which the gospel furnisheth us with, and from the perfect pattern of moral excellence which is set us by our blessed Saviour himself in his own holy life and practice! That the great apostle St. Paul was far from encouraging such austerities as tended to hurt and destroy the bodily health, sufficiently appears from the advice he gave to Timothy, "Drink no longer water, but use a little wine, for thy stomach's sake, and thine often infirmities," 1 Tim. v. 23. He condemneth those that, under pretence of extraordinary purity, were for observing the *ordinances* and *traditions* of men, "Touch not, taste not, handle not;" and brands their practice under the name of "will-worship, a voluntary humility, and neglecting," or, as the word might be rendered, "not sparing the body," Col. ii. 20—23. That which in the case of Abbé de Paris is cried up by his admirers as a carrying religion to the highest degree of perfection, viz. his abstaining from flesh, and confining himself to herbs, is represented by the apostle Paul as a sign of weakness in the faith, Rom. xiv. 2.

It hath always appeared to me to be the glory of the Christian religion, as prescribed in the New Testament, that the piety it teacheth us is solid and rational, remote from all superstitious extremes, worthy of a God of infinite wisdom and goodness to require, and becoming the true dignity of the reasonable nature. It

* Mosheim, ut supra, from p. 364 to p. 395.

comprehendeth not only immediate acts of devotion towards God, but a diligent performance of all relative duties, and the faithful discharge of the various offices incumbent upon us in the civil and social life. It requireth us indeed to bear with a noble fortitude the greatest evils, when we are regularly called to suffer for the cause of God, but not rashly to expose ourselves to those evils, or to bring them upon ourselves.

The wise and beneficent author of nature hath stored the whole world about us with a variety of benefits; and can it be thought to be agreeable to his will, that instead of tasting his goodness in the blessings he vouchsafeth us, we should make a merit of never allowing ourselves to enjoy them? How much more rational is it to receive those blessings with thankfulness, and enjoy them with temperance, according to that of St. Paul, "Every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving; for it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer," 1 Tim. iv. 4, 5. Can it be pleasing to our merciful heavenly Father, that we should not merely humble and chasten ourselves on special occasions, but make it our constant business to torment ourselves, and to impair and destroy the bodies he hath given us, and thereby unfit ourselves for the proper offices of life? Is it reasonable to imagine, that under the mild dispensation of the gospel, which breathes an ingenuous cheerful spirit, and raiseth us to the noble liberty of the children of God, the best way of recommending ourselves to his favour should be to deny ourselves all the comforts he affordeth us, and to pass our lives in perpetual sadness and abstinence? Could it be said in that case, that "godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come?" 1 Tim. iv. 8. It is true, that mortification and self-denial are important gospel duties, but how different from the extremes of superstitious rigour will appear, when I come to vindicate the evangelical morality against the objections of Mr. Hume. It was not till Christians began to degenerate from that lovely form of rational, solid piety and virtue, of which Christ himself exhibited the most perfect example, that they laid so mighty a stress on those severe and rigorous austerities, which neither our Saviour nor his apostles had commanded. And in this respect some of those who were anciently deemed heretical sects carried it to a greater degree of strictness than the orthodox themselves. And many zealots there have been in false religions, and particularly some of the heathen devotees in the East Indies, who in severe penances, and rigid austerities, and in voluntary torments inflicted on their own bodies, have far exceeded the Abbé de Paris himself.

I think no farther observations need be made with regard to Mr. Hume's "Essay on Miracles," which is directly levelled against Christianity. But any one that is acquainted with his writings must be sensible, that he often takes occasion to throw out insinuations against religion, which he usually represents either under the notion of superstition or enthusiasm. Even the morals of the gospel have not escaped his censure, though their excellence is such

as to have forced acknowledgments from some of those who have been strongly prejudiced against it.

There is a passage to this purpose in his "Inquiry concerning the Principles of Morals," which deserves particular notice. In that Inquiry, as in all his other works, he assumes the merit of making new discoveries, and placing things in a better light than any man had done before him; and wonders that a theory so *simple and obvious* as that which he hath advanced, *could have escaped the most elaborate scrutiny and examination*.^{*} I will not deny that there are in that Inquiry some good and curious observations; but I can see little that can be properly called new in his theory of morals, except his extending the notion of virtue (and it is concerning the principles of morals, and therefore concerning moral virtue, that his Inquiry proceeds) so as to comprehend under it every agreeable quality and accomplishment, such as *wit, ingenuity, eloquence, quickness of conception, facility of expression, delicacy of taste* in the finer arts, *politeness,† cleanliness*, and even *force of body*.‡ I cannot see what valuable end it can answer in a treatise of morals to extend the notion of virtue so far. It is of high importance to mankind rightly to distinguish things that are morally good and excellent from those which are not so; and therefore great care should be taken that both our ideas of these things, and the expressions designed to signify them, should be kept distinct. Wit, eloquence, and what we call natural parts, as well as acquired learning, politeness, cleanliness, and even strength of body, are no doubt real advantages, and when under a proper direction, and rightly applied, are both ornamental and useful, and are therefore not to be neglected, but, as far as we are able, to be cultivated and improved. This will be easily acknowledged; and if this be all Mr. Hume intends, it is far from being a new discovery. But these things make properly no part of moral virtue; nor can a man be said to be good and virtuous on the account of his being possessed of those qualities. He may have wit, eloquence, a polite behaviour, a fine taste in the arts, great bodily strength and resolution, and yet be really a bad man. And when these things are separated from good dispositions of the heart, from probity, benevolence, fidelity, integrity, gratitude, instead

^{*} Enquiry concerning the Principles of Morals, p. 172.

[†] It has been hinted to me by a worthy friend, that some have thought I did wrong in not allowing *politeness* to be ranked among the moral virtues. And therefore to prevent mistakes, I now observe, that if by politeness be meant a kind, obliging behaviour, expressive of humanity and benevolence, and flowing from it, it may be justly reckoned among the virtues; and in this sense a plain countryman, who is good-natured and obliging in his deportment to the utmost of his power, may be said to be truly a polite man. But this seems not to be the usual acceptance of the word in our language. By *politeness* is commonly understood a being well versed in the forms of what is usually called *good breeding*, and a genteel behaviour. And taken in that sense, however agreeable and ornamental it may be, I apprehend it is not properly a moral virtue; nor is the want of it a vice. And I believe it will scarce be denied, that a man may be really a good and worthy person, and yet not be what the world calls a polite well-bred man.

[‡] See the 6th, 7th, and 8th sections of the Inquiry concerning the Principles of Morals, particularly p. 127, 128, 131, 135, 137, 162, 165.

of rendering a man useful to the community, they qualify him for doing a great deal of mischief. These qualities therefore should be carefully distinguished from those which constitute a good moral character, and which ought to be principally recommended to the esteem and approbation of mankind, as having in themselves a real invariable worth and excellence, and as deriving a merit and value to every other quality. Nor is it proper, in a treatise of morals, which pretends to any degree of accuracy, to confound them all together under one common appellation of virtue.

And as Mr. Hume enlargeth his notion of virtue, so as to take in several things that do not seem properly to belong to the moral dispositions and qualities, so he excludeth from that character some things which are recommended in the gospel as of importance to the moral temper and conduct, particularly humility and self-denial. He observes, that "celibacy, fasting, penance, mortification, self-denial, humility, solitude, and the whole train of monkish virtues, are every where rejected by men of sense, because they serve no manner of purpose; they neither advance a man's fortune in the world, nor render him a more valuable member of society, neither qualify him for the entertainment of company, nor increase his power of self-enjoyment—On the contrary, they cross all these desirable ends, stupify the understanding, and harden the heart, obscure the fancy, and sour the temper."* Our author is here pleased to class *humility*, *mortification*, and *self-denial*, which are evidently required in the gospel, with *penances*, *celibacy*, and what he calls the monkish virtues; and pronounceth concerning all alike, that they are rejected by all *men of sense*, and not only serve no manner of purpose, but have a bad influence in stupifying the understanding, hardening the heart, and souring the temper. This is no doubt to cast a slur upon the gospel scheme of morality. And on the other hand he cries up his own theory of morals, as representing *Virtue in all her engaging charms*. That "nothing appears but gentleness, humanity, beneficence, affability, nay even at proper intervals, play, frolic, and gaiety. She talks not of useless austerities and rigours, sufferance and self-denial, &c."† A scheme of morals which includeth *play*, *frolic*, and *gaiety*, and has nothing to do with *self-denial*, *mortification*, and *sufferance*, will no doubt be very agreeable to many in this gay and frolicsome age. But let us examine more distinctly what ground there is for our author's censures, as far as the Christian morals are concerned.

To begin with that which he seemeth to have a particular aversion to, *self-denial*. This is certainly what our Saviour expressly requireth of those who would approve themselves his faithful disciples. He insisteth upon it, as an essential condition of their discipleship, they should deny themselves—Mat. xvi. 24. Mark viii. 34. And if we do not suffer ourselves to be frightened by the mere sound of words, but consider what is really intended, this is one of the most useful lessons of morality, and a necessary ingredient in a

* Inquiry concerning the Principles of Morals, p. 174.

† Ibid. p. 188.

truly excellent and virtuous character. One thing intended in this self-denial is the restraining and governing our appetites and passions, and keeping them within proper bounds, and in a due subjection to the higher powers of reason and conscience; and this is certainly an important part of self-government and discipline, and is undoubtedly a noble attainment, and which argueth a true greatness of soul. And however difficult or disagreeable it may at first be to the animal part of our natures, it is really necessary to our happiness, and layeth the best foundation for a solid tranquillity and satisfaction of mind. Again, if we take self-denial for a readiness to deny our private interest and advantage for valuable and excellent ends, for the honour of God, or the public good, for promoting the happiness of others, or our own eternal salvation, and for serving the cause of truth and righteousness in the world; in this view nothing can be more noble and praiseworthy. And indeed whoever considers that an inordinate selfishness, and addictedness to a narrow fleshly interest, and the gratification of the carnal appetites and passions, is the source of the chief disorders of human life, will be apt to look upon self-denial to be of great consequence to morals. Without some degree of self-denial, nothing truly great, noble, or generous is to be achieved or attained. He that cannot bear to deny himself upon proper occasions, will never be of any great use either to himself or to others, nor can make any progress in the most virtuous and excellent endowments, or even in agreeable qualities, and true politeness. This writer himself, speaking of *the love of fame*, which, he tells us, rules in all generous minds, observes, that as this prevailleth, *the animal conveniences sink gradually in their value*.^{*} And elsewhere, in the person of the Stoic philosopher, he saith, that "we must often make such important sacrifices, as those of life and fortune, to virtue:" And that "the man of virtue looks down with contempt on all the allurements of pleasure, and all the menaces of danger—toils, dangers, and death itself carry their charms, when we brave them for the public good."[†] And even after having told us, that virtue talks not of sufferance and self-denial, he adds, that "virtue never willingly parts with any pleasure, but in hope of ample compensation in some other period of their lives. The sole trouble she demands is of a just calculation, and a steady preference of the greater happiness."[‡] Here he allows, that virtue may reasonably part with present pleasure, in hope of an ample compensation in some other period of our lives, when upon a just calculation it contributes to our greater happiness. But then he seems to confine the hope of the compensation which virtue is to look for, to some future period of this present life, which, considering the shortness and uncertainty of it, is little to be depended on, and may perhaps be thought not a sufficient foundation for a man's denying himself present pleasures and advantages. But the gospel

^{*} Inquiry concerning the Principles of Morals, p. 186.

[†] Moral and Political Essays, p. 213.

[‡] Inquiry concerning the Principles of Morals, p. 186.

proposeth a much more noble and powerful consideration, *viz.* the securing a future everlasting happiness; and supposing the certainty of this, of which we have the fullest assurance given us, nothing can be more agreeable to all the rules of reason and just calculation, than to part with present pleasure, or to undergo present hardships, to obtain it.

What hath been offered with regard to the important duty of self-denial may help us to form a just notion of *mortification*, which is nearly connected with it, and which our author also findeth great fault with. The chief thing intended by it is the subduing our fleshly appetites, and our vicious and irregular inclinations and desires. To this purpose it is required of us, that we "mortify the deeds of the body," Rom. viii. 13. that we "mortify our members that are on the earth, fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry," Col. iii. 5.; and that we "crucify the flesh, with the affections and lusts," Gal. v. 24. Mortification taken in this view is a noble act of virtue, and absolutely necessary to maintain the dominion of the spirit over the flesh, the superiority of reason over the inferior appetites. Where these prevail, they tend to *stupidify the understanding, and harden the heart*, and hinder a man from being a *valuable member of society*, which is what Mr. Hume most unjustly chargeth upon that mortification and self-denial which is required in the gospel. Mortification is properly opposed to that indulging and pampering the flesh, which tendeth to nourish and strengthen those appetites and lusts, which it is the part of a wise and virtuous man to correct and subdue. Even fasting upon proper seasons and occasions, however ridiculed by Mr. Hume and others, may answer a very valuable end, and make a useful part of self-discipline. It may tend both to the health of the body, and to keep the mind more clean and vigorous, as well as, when accompanied with prayer, promote a true spirit of devotion. But in this as in every thing else, the Christian religion, considered in its original purity as laid down in the New Testament, preserveth a most wise moderation, and is far from carrying things to extremes, as superstition hath often done. It doth not any where insist upon excessive, or what our author calls useless rigours and austerities. And so far is that mortification which the Gospel prescribeth, and which is nothing more than the keeping the body under a just discipline, and in a due subjection to the law of the mind, from being inconsistent with the true pleasure and satisfaction of life, that it layeth the most solid foundation for it. Mr. Hume himself takes notice of the "*supreme joy* which is to be found in the victories over vice, when men are taught to govern their passions, to reform their vices, and subdue their worst enemies, which inhabit within their own bosoms."*

Not only does this gentleman find fault with self-denial and mortification, but with *sufferance*. Virtue, according to his representation of it, *talks not of sufferance and self-denial*. And yet certain

* Moral and Political Essays, p. 213.

it is, that among the best moralists of all ages it has been accounted one of the principal offices of virtue, to support us with a steady fortitude under all the evils that befall us in this present state, and enable us patiently and even cheerfully to bear them. A virtue that cannot suffer adversity, nor bear us up under it with dignity, and in a proper manner, is of little value in a world where we are exposed to such a variety of troubles and sorrows. And in this the Gospel morality is infinitely superior to that of the most admired pagan philosophers. Mr. Hume has reckoned among virtues "an undisturbed philosophical tranquillity, superior to pain, sorrow, anxiety, and each assault of adverse fortune."* But what is this philosophical tranquillity, so much boasted of, relying only upon itself, compared with that which ariseth from the consolations set before us in the gospel, from the assurances of divine assistances and supports, from the love of God and sense of his favour, from the lively animating hopes of glory, and the eternal rewards which shall crown our patience, and persevering continuance in well-doing?

The last thing I shall take notice of, as represented under a disadvantageous character by Mr. Hume, though highly commended and insisted on by our Saviour, is *humility*; and this rightly understood is one of the most amiable virtues, and greatest ornaments of the human nature. Our author is pleased to talk of a *certain degree of pride and self-valuation*, the want of which is a *vice*, and the opposite of which is *meanness*.† But to call a proper generosity of mind, which is above a mean or base thing, *pride*, is an abuse of words, which ought not to be admitted, if we would speak with exactness, in an inquiry concerning morals. It is to give the name of an odious vice to a very worthy disposition of soul. The gospel humility is a very different thing from meanness. It is very consistent with such a just self-valuation, as raiseth us above every thing false, mean, base, and impure, and keepeth us from doing any thing unbecoming the dignity of the reasonable nature, and the glorious character and privileges we are invested with as Christians. True humility doth not absolutely exclude all sense of our own good qualities and attainments; but it tempers the sense we have of them with a just conviction of our absolute dependance upon God for every good thing we are possessed of, and of our manifold sins, infirmities, and defects. It is oppose to a vain-glorious boasting and self-sufficiency, and to such a high conceit of our abilities and merits, as puffeth us up with a presumptuous confidence in ourselves, and contempt of others, and which is indeed one of the greatest hinderances to our progress in the most excellent and worthy attainments. It manifesteth itself towards God, by an entire unreserved subjection and resignation to his authority and will, by proper acknowledgments of our own unworthiness before him, and a sense of our continual dependance upon him, and constant need of his gracious assistance. And it expresseth itself

* Inquiry concerning the Principles of Morals, p. 152.

† Ibid. p. 146, 147.

towards men, by causing us to yield a due submission to our superiors, and to be affable and condescending to our inferiors, courteous and obliging towards our equals, in honour preferring one another, as St. Paul expresseth it, and ready to bear with each other's weaknesses and absurdities. In a word, it diffuseth its kindly influence through the whole of our deportment, and all the offices of life. Nothing is so hateful as pride and arrogance. And true humility is so amiable, so engaging, so necessary to render a person agreeable, that no man can hope to please, who hath not at least the appearance of it. Our author himself observes, that "among well-bred people, a mutual deference is affected, contempt of others disguised ;"* and that "as we are naturally proud and selfish, and apt to assume the preference above others, a polite man is taught to behave with deference towards those he converses with, and to yield the superiority to them in all the common occurrences of society."† So that, according to him, a show of humility and preferring others to ourselves, is a necessary part of good behaviour ; and yet he is pleased to reckon humility among those things that neither render a man a more valuable member of society, nor qualify him for the entertainment of company, but on the contrary cross those desirable purposes, and harden the heart, and sour the temper.

But enough of Mr. Hume, who, if we may judge of him by his writings, will scarce be charged with the fault of having carried humility to an excess. A pity it is that he hath not made a better use of his abilities and talents, which might have laid a just foundation for acquiring the praise he seems so fond of, as well as rendered him really useful to the world, if he had been as industrious to employ them in serving and promoting the excellent cause of religion, as he hath unhappily been in endeavouring to weaken and expose it!

POSTSCRIPT.

AFTER great part of this work was finished, and sent to the press, I met with a book, which I have read with great pleasure, entitled, "The Criterion ; or, Miracles Examined, with a View to expose the Pretensions of Pagans and Papists ; to compare the miraculous Powers recorded in the New Testament, with those said to subsist in latter Times ; and to show the great and material Difference between them in point of evidence ; from whence it will appear, that the former must be true, and the latter may be false." The subject is evidently both curious and important, and is treated by the author, who, I hear, is the Rev. Mr. Douglass, in a judicious

* Inquiry concerning the Principles of Morals, p. 161, 162. † Moral and Political Essays, p. 184, 185.

and masterly way. It was published at London in 1754, and therefore before the publication of the second volume of the "View of the Deistical Writers." And if I had then seen it, I should certainly have thought myself obliged to take particular notice of it. The worthy author has made judicious observations upon Mr. Hume's "Essay on Miracles," especially that part of it which relateth to the Miracles ascribed to the Abbé de Paris, which he has insisted on for an hundred pages together. And it is no small satisfaction to me, that there is a perfect harmony between what this learned author has written on this subject, and what I have published in the preceding part of this work, though neither of us knew of the other's work. He shows, as I have endeavoured to do, that fraud and imposture were plainly detected in several instances; and that where the facts were true, natural causes sufficient to produce the effect may be assigned, without supposing any thing miraculous in the case. This he has particularly shown, with regard to each of the miracles insisted on by Mr. de Montgeron, which he accounts for in the same way that Mr. des Voeux hath more largely done, though he had not seen that gentleman's valuable writings, to which I have frequently referred for a fuller account of those things, which I could do little more than hint at.

The reader will find in Mr. Douglass's work a full proof of the wonderful force of the imagination, and the mighty influence that strong impressions made upon the mind, and vehement passions raised there, may have in producing surprising changes on the body, and particularly in removing diseases; of which he hath produced several well-attested instances, no less extraordinary than those attributed to the Abbé de Paris, and which yet cannot reasonably be pretended to be properly miraculous.

As I have thought myself obliged to take notice of that part of this gentleman's book, which hath so near a connection with the work in which I have been engaged; so it is but just to observe, that it is also, with regard to every other part of it, a learned and accurate performance.

What he proposes to show is, that the evidence for the gospel facts is as extraordinary as the facts themselves; and that no just suspicion of fraud or falsehood appeareth in the accounts; while every thing is the reverse, with regard to the evidence brought for the pagan or popish miracles.

He observes, that the extraordinary facts ascribed to a miraculous interposition among the Pagans of old, or the Christians of latter times, are all reducible to these two classes. The accounts are either such as, from the circumstances thereof, appear to be false; or, the facts are such as, by the nature thereof, they do not appear to be miraculous. As to the first, the general rules he lays down, by which we may try the pretended miracles amongst Pagans and Papists, and which may set forth the grounds on which we suppose them to be false, are these three: That either they were not published to the world till long after the time when they were said to be performed: Or, they were not published in the places where it is

pretended the facts were wrought, but were propagated only at a great distance from the scene of action : Or, they were suffered to pass without due examination, because they coincided with the favourite opinions and prejudices of those to whom they were reported ; or, because the accounts were encouraged and supported by those who alone had the power of detecting the fraud, and could prevent any examination, which might tend to undeceive the world. These observations he applies to the pagan and popish miracles ; some of the most remarkable of which he distinctly mentions, and shows, that there are none of them that do not labour under one or other of these defects.

After considering those pretended miracles, which, from the circumstances of the accounts given of them, appear to be false, he next proceedeth to those works, which, though they may be true, and ascribed by ignorance, art, or credulity, to supernatural causes, yet are really natural, and may be accounted for, without supposing any miraculous interposition ; and here he enters on a large and particular discussion of the miracles attributed to the Abbé de Paris, and of some other miracles that have been much boasted of in the Romish church.

Having fully examined and exposed the pagan and popish miracles, he next proceeds to show, that the objections made against them, and which administer just grounds of suspicion, cannot be urged against the gospel miracles. And here he distinctly shows, First, that the facts were such that, from the nature of them, they must needs be miraculous, and cannot be accounted for in a natural way, or by any power of imagination, or strong impressions made upon the mind ; and, Secondly, that those facts are such as, from the circumstances of them, they cannot be false. And to this purpose, he makes it appear, that they were published and appealed to at the time when they were performed, and were coeval with the preaching of Christianity, which was manifestly founded upon them. They were also published and attested at the places where the scene of them was laid, and on the spot on which they were wrought ; and the circumstances, under which they were first published, give us an assurance, that they underwent a strict examination, and consequently that they could not have escaped detection had they been impostures.

Mr. Douglass thinks it not sufficient barely to prove, that the testimony for the gospel-miracles is stronger than that which supporteth any other pretended miracles ; he further shows, by a variety of considerations, that it is the strongest that can be supposed, or that from the nature of the thing could be had. And then he proceeds to observe, that, besides the unexceptionable proof from testimony, the credibility of the gospel-miracles is confirmed to us, by collateral evidences of the most striking nature, and which no spurious miracles can boast of ; such as the great change that was thereby introduced into the state of religion ; the proofs that God was with the first publishers of Christianity, in other instances besides those of miracles, particularly in assisting them supernatu-

rally in the knowledge of the scheme of religion which they taught, and of which they were not capable of being the authors or inventors, and enabling them to give clear predictions of future events. And particularly he insisteth upon that most express and circumstantial prediction of the destruction of the city and temple of Jerusalem, and the dispersion of the Jewish nation, as a demonstration that Jesus acted under a supernatural influence. The last thing he urgeth as a collateral evidence is, that the miracles recorded in Scripture were performed by those who assumed the character of prophets, or teachers sent from God, and their miracles were intended as credentials to establish their claim, to add authority to the messages they delivered, and the laws they taught: a character which, he shows, both the pagan and popish miracles are entirely destitute of.

This is a brief account of the plan of Mr. Douglass's work, which fully answereth the title; and it is with great pleasure I take this opportunity to acknowledge the merit of the learned author, and the service he hath done to the Christian and Protestant cause.

I am Sir, &c.

LETTER XXII.

Lord Bolingbroke's Posthumous Works an insolent Attempt upon Religion, natural and revealed.—Not written according to the Laws of Method.—His fair Professions, and the advantageous Account he gives of his own Design.—He exalteth himself above all that have written before him, Ancients and Moderns; blames the Free-thinkers for taking unbecoming Liberties; yet writes himself without any Regard to the Rules of Decency.—His outrageous Invectives against the Holy Scriptures, particularly the Writings of Moses and St. Paul.—The severe Censures he passeth on the most celebrated Heathen Philosophers.—But, above all, the virulent and contemptuous Reproaches he casteth upon Christian Philosophers and Divines.—A general Account of his Scheme, and the main Principles to which it is reducible.

SIR,

THE account you gave me of the late pompous edition of the works of the late Lord Viscount Bolingbroke in five large volumes 4to. made me very desirous to see them. But it was some time after the publication of them, before I had an opportunity of gratifying my curiosity. I have now read them with some care and attention.

The works he had published in his own life-time, and which are republished in this edition, had created a high opinion of the genius and abilities of the author. In them he had treated chiefly concerning matters of a political nature; and it were greatly to be wished for his own reputation, and for the benefit of mankind, that he had confined himself to subjects of that kind, in that part of his works which he designed to be published after his decease. These his

posthumous works make by far the greater part of this collection. His "Letters on the Study and Use of History," which were published before the rest, had prepared the world not to look for any thing from him, that was friendly to Christianity or the holy Scriptures. But I am apt to think, that the extreme insolence, the virulence and contempt with which in his other posthumous works he hath treated those things that have been hitherto accounted most sacred among Christians, and the open attacks he hath made upon some important principles of natural religion itself, have exceeded whatever was expected or imagined. There is ground to apprehend, that the quality and reputation of the author, his high pretensions to reason and freedom of thought, his great command of words, and the positive and dictatorial air he every where assumes, may be apt to impose upon many readers, and may do mischief in an age too well prepared already for receiving such impressions. Upon these considerations, you have been pleased to think, that a distinct examination of this writer might help to furnish a very proper supplement to the view which hath been taken of the deistical writers of the last and present century. I was, I must confess, not very fond of the employment; for what pleasure could be proposed in raking into such a heap of materials, which are thrown together without much order, and among which one is sure to meet with many things shocking to any man that has a just veneration for our holy religion, and who hath its honour and interests really at heart?

Before I enter on a distinct consideration of what Lord Bolingbroke hath offered both against natural and revealed religion, I shall make some general observations on his spirit and design, and his manner of treating the subjects he has undertaken, which may help us to form a judgment of his character as a writer, and how far he is to be depended upon.

The manner of writing his Lordship hath generally chosen is by way of essay. He has been far from confining himself to the laws of method; and perhaps thought it beneath so great a genius to stoop to common rules. But there is certainly a medium between being too stiff and pedantic, and too loose and negligent. He is sensible that he has not been very methodical, and seems to please himself in it. He declares, that "he does not observe in these Essays, any more than he used to do in conversation, a just proportion in the members of his discourse;"* and that he has thrown his reflections upon paper as they "occurred to his thoughts, and as the frequent interruptions to which he was exposed would give him leave."† He condescends to make a kind of apology for this way of writing, when he says, "I will endeavour not to be tedious; and this endeavour will succeed the better perhaps by declining any over-strict observation of method."‡ But I am apt to think he would have been less tedious, and more enlightening to his reader, if he had been more observant of the rules of method. He might then have avoided many of those repetitions and digressions, which so

* Works, vol. iii. p. 460.

† Ibid. p. 556.

‡ Ibid. 318.

frequently recur in these Essays, and which, notwithstanding all the advantages of his style, and the vivacity of his imagination, often prove, if I may judge of others by myself, very disagreeable and irksome to the reader.

As to his design in these writings, if we are to take his own word for it, very great advantage might be expected from them to mankind. He believes "few men have consulted others, both the living and the dead, with less precipitation, and in a greater spirit of docility, than he has done: He distrusted himself, not his teachers, men of the greatest name, ancient and modern. But he found at last, that it was safer to trust himself than them, and to proceed by the light of his own understanding, than to wander after those *ignes fatui* of philosophy."* He is sensible that "it is the modest, not the presumptuous inquirer, who makes a real and safe progress in the discovery of divine truth;"† and that "candour and knowledge are qualifications which should always go together, and are inseparable from the love of truth, and promote one another in the discovery of it."‡ He contents himself to be "governed by the dictates of nature, and is therefore in no danger of becoming atheistical, superstitious, or sceptical."§

In his introduction to his Essays, in a letter to Mr. Pope, he gives a most pompous account of his intentions, and evidently raiseth himself above the greatest men, ancient and modern. He "represents metaphysical divines and philosophers, as having bewildered themselves, and a great part of mankind, in such inextricable labyrinths of hypothetical reasonings, that few can find their way back, and none can find it forward into the road of truth."|| He declares that, "natural theology, and natural religion, have been corrupted to such a degree, that it is grown, and was long since, as necessary to plead the cause of God against the divine as against the atheist; to assert his existence against the latter, to defend his attributes against the former, and to justify his providence against both."¶ That "truth and falsehood, knowledge and ignorance, revelations of the Creator, inventions of the creature, dictates of reason, sallies of enthusiasm, have been blended so long together in systems of theology, that it may be thought dangerous to separate them."** And he seems to think this was a task reserved for him. He proposes "to distinguish genuine and pure theism from the prophane mixtures of human imagination; and to go to the root of that error which encourages our curiosity, sustains our pride, fortifies our prejudices, and gives pretence to delusion; to discover the true nature of human knowledge, how far it extends, how far it is real, and where and how it begins to be fantastical;†† that the gaudy visions of error being dispelled, men may be accustomed to the simplicity of truth." For this he expects to be "treated with scorn and contempt by the whole theological and metaphysical tribe, and railed

* Works, vol. iii. p. 320. † Ibid. p. 344. ‡ Ibid. p. 492.

§ Ibid. vol. v. p. 492. || Ibid. vol. iii. p. 327. ¶ Ibid. p. 327, 328.

** Ibid. p. 331.

†† Ibid. p. 328.

at as an infidel.”* But “laying aside all the immense volumes of fathers and councils, schoolmen, casuists, and controversial writers, he is determined to seek for genuine Christianity with that simplicity of spirit with which it is taught in the gospel by Christ himself.”† The guides he proposes to follow are, “the works and the word of God.”‡ And he declares, that “for himself he thought it much better not to write at all, than to write under any restraint from delivering the whole truth of things as it appeared to him.”§

But though he thus professes an impartial love of truth, and to deliver his sentiments with freedom, yet he seems resolved, where he happens to differ from the received opinion, not to show a decent regard to the established religion of his country. He praiseth Scævola and Varro, who, he says, “both thought that things evidently false might deserve an outward respect, when they are interwoven with a system of government. This outward respect every good subject will show them in such a case. He will not propagate those errors, but he will be cautious how he propagates even truth in opposition to them.”|| He blames not only that arbitrary *tyrannical spirit* that puts on the mask of religious zeal, but that *presumptuous factious spirit* that has appeared under the mask of liberty; and which, if it should prevail, would destroy at once the general influence of religion, by shaking the foundations of it which education had laid. But he thinks, “there is a middle way between these extremes, in which a reasonable man and a good citizen may direct his steps.”¶ It is to be presumed therefore, that he would have it thought that this is the way he himself hath taken. He mentions with approbation the maxims of the Soufys, a sect of philosophers in Persia; one of which is: “If you find no reason to doubt concerning the opinions of your fathers, keep to them, they will be sufficient for you. If you find any reason to doubt concerning them, seek the truth quietly, but take care not to disturb the minds of other men.” He professeth to proceed by these rules, and blameth some who are called Free-thinkers for imagining, that as every man has a right to think and judge for himself, he has therefore a right of speaking according to the full freedom of his thoughts. The freedom belongs to him as a rational creature: He lies under the restraint as a member of society.”**

But notwithstanding these fair professions, perhaps there scarce ever was an author who had less regard to the rules of decency in writing than Lord Bolingbroke. The holy Scriptures are received with great veneration among Christians; and the religion there taught is the religion publicly professed and established in these nations; and therefore, according to his own rule, ought to be treated with a proper respect. And yet on many occasions he throws out the most outrageous abuse against those sacred writings, and the authors of them. He compares the history of the Pentateuch to the romances Don Quixote was so fond

* Works, vol. iii. p. 330. † Ibid. p. 339. ‡ Ibid. p. 347. § Ibid. vol. iv. p. 54.
|| Ibid. vol. iii. p. 331. ¶ Ibid. p. 332. ** Ibid. p. 333, 334.

of; and pronounces that they who receive them as authentic are not much less mad than he.* That "it is no less than blasphemy to assert the Jewish Scriptures to have been divinely inspired;" and he represents those that attempt to justify them as having "ill hearts as well as heads, and as worse than atheists, though they may pass for saints."† He chargeth those with impiety, who would impose on us, as the word of God, a book which contains scarce any thing that is not repugnant to the wisdom, power, and other attributes of a Supreme All-perfect Being.‡ And he roundly pronounceth, that "there are gross defects and palpable falsehoods in almost every page of the Scriptures, and the whole tenor of them is such, as no man, who acknowledges a Supreme All-perfect Being, can believe to be his word."§ This is a brief specimen of his invectives against the sacred writings of the Old Testament, and which he repeateth on many occasions. He affecteth indeed to speak with seeming respect of Christianity, yet he has not only endeavoured to invalidate the evidences that are brought to support it, but he passeth the severest censures upon doctrines which he himself representeth as original and essential doctrines of the Christian religion. He makes the most injurious representation of the doctrine of our redemption by the blood of Christ, and chargeth it as repugnant to all our ideas of order, of justice, of goodness, and even of theism.|| And after a most virulent invective against the Jewish notion of God, as partial, cruel, arbitrary, and unjust, he asserts, that the character imputed to him by the Christian doctrine of redemption, and future punishments, is as bad or worse.¶ Great is the contempt and reproach he hath poured forth upon St. Paul, who was the penman of a considerable part of the New Testament, and whose name and writings have been always deservedly had in great veneration in the Christian church. He chargeth him with dissimulation and falsehood, and even with madness.** He asserts that his gospel was different from that of Christ, and contradictory to it;†† that he writes confusedly, obscurely, and unintelligibly;—and where his gospel is intelligible, it is often absurd, profane, and trifling.‡‡

Some of those gentlemen who have shown little respect for the holy Scriptures, have yet spoke with admiration of many of the sages of antiquity; but Lord Bolingbroke has on all occasions treated the greatest men of all ages with the utmost contempt and scorn. It is allowable indeed for sincere and impartial inquirers after truth, to differ from persons of high reputation for knowledge and learning, ancient and modern: and sometimes it is the more necessary to point out their errors, lest the authority of great names should lead men aside from truth. But whilst we think ourselves obliged to detect their mistakes, there is a decent regard to be paid them: it would be wrong to treat them in a reproachful and contemptuous manner. Yet this is what our author hath done. If all

* Works, vol. iii. p. 280. † Ibid. p. 299, 306. ‡ Ibid. p. 308.

§ Ibid. p. 298. || Ibid. vol. iv. p. 318. vol. v. p. 291, 532. ¶ Ibid. p. 532, 533.

** Ibid. vol. iv. p. 172, 306. †† Ibid. p. 313, 327, 328. ‡‡ Ibid. vol. iii. p. 330, 331.

the passages were laid together, in which he hath inveighed against the wisest and most learned men of all ages, especially the philosophers, metaphysicians, and divines, they would fill no small volume. And indeed these kind of declamatory invectives recur so often in these Essays, as cannot but create great disgust to every reader of taste. I shall mention a few passages out of a multitude that might be produced, and which may serve as a sample of the rest. He saith of the philosophers, that "they seem to acquire knowledge only as a necessary step to error, and grow so fond of the latter, that they esteem it no longer human, but raise it by an imaginary apotheosis up to a divine science; that these searchers after truth, these lovers of wisdom, are nothing better than venders of false wares; and the most irrational of all proceedings pass for the utmost efforts of human reason."* He represents metaphysical divines and philosophers as having "wandered many thousand years in imaginary light and darkness."† He frequently chargeth them with *madness*, and sometimes with *blasphemy*; and that they "staggered about, and jostled one another in their dreams."‡ Speaking of Plato and Aristotle, he says, "their works have been preserved, perhaps more to the detriment than to the advancement of learning."§ And though he sometimes commends Socrates, he pronounces, that he "substituted fantastical ideas instead of real knowledge, and corrupted science to the very source;" that "he lost himself in the clouds—when he declared, that the two offices of philosophy are, the contemplation of God, and the abstracting of the soul from corporeal sense;" and that he and Plato were mad enough to think themselves capable of such contemplation and such abstraction.|| Besides many occasional passages scattered throughout these Essays, there are several large sections which contain almost nothing else than invectives against Plato and his philosophy. He says, that philosopher "treated every subject, whether corporeal or intellectual, like a bombast poet, and a mad theologian:"¶ that "he who reads Plato's works like a man in his senses, will be tempted to think on many occasions that the author was not so;" and that "no man ever dreamed so wildly as this author wrote."** He chargeth him with a "false sublime in style, and that no writer can sink lower than he into a tedious socratical irony, into certain flimsy hypothetical reasonings that prove nothing, and into allusions that are mere vulgarisms, and that neither explain nor enforce any thing that wants to be explained or enforced."†† He represents all the commentators and translators of Plato as *dull* or *mad*; and calls Ficinus *delirious*, and Dacier *simple* and a *bigot*, and a *Platonic madman*.‡‡ The true reason of the particular dislike he every-where expresses against that philosopher seems to be what he calls his "rambling speculations about the divine and spiritual nature, about immaterial substances,

* Works, vol. iii. p. 490.

† Ibid. vol. iii. p. 553, 554. vol. iv. p. 129. 150.

‡ Ibid. vol. iv. p. 113.

¶ Ibid. p. 129.

†† Ibid. p. 140, 141. 353, 354.

‡ Ibid. vol. iv. p. 8.

§ Ibid. vol. iii. p. 392.

** Ibid. p. 344. 357.

‡‡ Ibid. p. 107. 140. 355.

about the immortality of the soul, and about the rewards and punishments of a future state.”*

As to the Stoics, he declares, “that their theology and morality were alike absurd:” that, in endeavouring to account how it came that there is evil in the world, and that the best men have often the greatest share of this evil, “they talked mere nonsense, figurative, sublime, metaphysical, but nonsense still.”† The ancient *theists* in general he represents as having been seduced many ways into a confederacy with the atheists, and particularly blames them for pretending to connect moral attributes, such as we conceive them, with the physical attributes of God; which, he affirms, gave great advantage to the objections of the atheists.‡

But there is no sort of men against whom he inveighs with greater license of reproach than the Christian divines and philosophers. He frequently speaks of the ancient fathers with the utmost contempt: that they were superstitious, credulous, lying men;—and that “the greatest of them were unfit to write or speak on any subject that required closeness of reasoning, an evangelical candour, and even common ingenuousness.”§ As to the more modern divines, he takes every occasion of insulting and abusing them. Not only doth he represent them as declaimers who have little respect for their readers,—as hired to defend the Christian system,—and as seeking nothing more than the honour of the gown, by having the last word in every dispute;”|| but he says, “they talk a great deal of blasphemy on the head of internal divine characters of Scripture.”¶ He often repeats it, that *atheists deny God*, but the *divines* *defame him*, which, he thinks, is the *worse of the two*. He charges them with *madness*, and *worse than madness*:** that “they have recourse to trifling distinction, and dogmatical affirmations, the last retrenchments of obstinacy:”†† that “of all fools, the most presumptuous, and at the same time most trifling, are metaphysical philosophers and divines.”‡‡ He charges them, in an address he makes to God, with “owning his existence only to censure his works, and the dispensations of his providence.”§§ And frequently represents them as in *alliance with the atheists*, as *betraying the cause of God* to them, and as doing *their best, in concert with these their allies*, to destroy both the *goodness* and *justice* of God.|||| He declares, that “he who follows them cannot avoid presumption and profaneness, and must be much upon his guard to avoid blasphemy:”¶¶ “that the preachers of natural and revealed religion have been loudest in their clamours against Providence, and have done nothing more than repeat what the atheists have said;—and that they attempt to prove that the Supreme Being is the tyrant of the world he governs.”(a) And the same charge he advanceth against the Christian philosophers in general.

* Works, vol. iv. p. 347, 348.

† Ibid. vol. v. p. 247, 317.

‡ Ibid. p. 316.

§ Ibid. vol. iii. p. 337, 338. vol. iv. p. 566.

|| Ibid. p. 290. vol. v. p. 286, 314. ¶ Ibid. vol. iii. p. 272.

** Ibid. vol. iv. p. 273.

†† Ibid. vol. v. p. 186. ‡‡ Ibid. p. 493. §§ Ibid. p. 339.

|||| Ibid. p. 341, 346, 393, &c.

¶¶ Ibid. p. 464. (a) Ibid. vol. v. p. 484, 485.

But besides these general invectives against Christian philosophers and divines, he hath particularly attacked some of the most celebrated names in a manner little reconcileable to good manners, and the decency which ought to be observed towards persons of distinguished reputation, even when we think them in the wrong. Speaking of "many reverend persons, who," he says, "have had their heads turned by a preternatural fermentation of the brain, or a philosophical delirium,"—he observes, "that none has been more so than Dr. Cudworth.—He read too much to think enough." He represents him as having "given a nonsensical paraphrase of nonsense;"—and that "the good man passed his life in the study of an unmeaning jargon: and as he learned, so he taught."* He charges Bishop Cumberland with "metaphysical jargon, and theological blasphemy."† Stillingfleet is spoken of with contempt; as also Huet, Bochart, and the Christian antiquaries.‡ Nor is archbishop Tillotson treated with greater regard. He talks in a very slighting way of those that have written on the law of nature, particularly Grotius, Selden, and Puffendorf: that they "puzzle and perplex the plainest thing in the world, and seem to be great writers on this subject, by much the same right as he might be called a great traveller, who should go from London to Paris by the Cape of Good Hope."§ There is none of the Christian philosophers of whom he speaks with so much respect as Mr. Locke; yet he represents him as having "dreamed that he had a power of forming abstract ideas;" and mentions this as a proof, that there is such a thing as a philosophical delirium."|| And he charges it upon him as a great inconsistency, that he should write a Commentary on St. Paul's Epistles, and a Discourse on the Reasonableness of Christianity, after he had written an Essay on Human Understanding.¶

But there is no one person whom he treats with so much rudeness and insolence as the late eminently learned Dr. Samuel Clarke. He calls him a presumptuous dogmatist, and represents him as having "impiously advanced, that we know the rule God governs by as well as he,—and that, like another Eunomius, he presumes to know God, his moral nature at least, and to teach others to know him, as well as he knows himself."** He chargeth him with a *foolish and wicked rhodomontade*, "with pretending to make infallible demonstrations, like the Pope's decrees, and sending every one to the devil who does not believe in them;†† and with a rhapsody of presumptuous reasonings, of profane absurdities, of evasions that seem to answer while they only perplex, and in one word, the most arbitrary and least reasonable suppositions."‡‡ He saith, that "the retrenchments cast up by him are feeble beyond belief." That "he boasts like a bully, who looks fierce, speaks big, and is little to be feared."§§ Not only does he call him an *audacious and vain sophist*,|| but he

* Works, vol. iii. p. 353. vol. iv. p. 92.

† Ibid. vol. iii. p. 264. vol. iv. p. 13.

‡ Ibid. vol. ii. p. 441, 442.

§ Ibid. vol. iii. p. 52. vol. v. p. 449.

§§ Ibid. p. 280. 293.

|| Ibid. p. 293.

† Ibid. vol. v. p. 82.

§ Ibid. vol. v. p. 68.

¶ Ibid. vol. iv. p. 166. 295.

†† Ibid. p. 252.

‡‡ Ibid. p. 292.

carries it so far as to say, that "he and Wollaston do in effect renounce God, as much as the rankest of the atheistical tribe.* With regard to the last mentioned celebrated writer, Mr. Wollaston, besides the severe reproach cast upon him in the passage I have just cited, Lord Bolingbroke elsewhere treats him as "a licentious maker of hypotheses—and a whining philosopher." He represents all that he hath said about the immortality of the soul "as a string of arbitrary suppositions;" and that "his discourse on that subject is such as would lead one to think, that the philosopher who held it was a patient of Dr. Monro's not yet perfectly restored to his senses.† He acknowledges him indeed to have been a man of *parts and learning*, but charges him with *writing nonsense*; that he, and such as he, were *learned lunatics*; and he treats his way of arguing about a future state, as a *specimen of that sort of madness* which is called a *dementia quoad hoc*.‡ The same censure he passeth on the late Lord President of Scotland, "that he was indeed a man of capacity, good sense, and knowledge, but was in a *delirium*, and *mad, quoad hoc*, when he wrote against Tindal."§

You cannot but have observed, in reading over several of the passages which have been produced, that it is familiar with Lord Bolingbroke to represent those as mad and out of their senses who happen to differ from him, at least as mad with regard to the particular point in difference. I shall only mention one passage more to this purpose out of the many that might be produced. Having compared the reasoners *a priori* to persons in *Bedlam*, and the several sorts of madmen there, he adds, that "atheists are one sort of madmen, many divines and theists another sort;" and that these sorts of madmen are principally to be found in colleges and schools, where different sects have rendered this sort of madness, which is occasionally elsewhere, both epidemical and traditional."|| If one were to imitate this author's manner of talking, one might be apt to charge him as being seized with a sort of madness, when certain subjects come in his way—metaphysics; artificial theology: Plato and Platonic philosophy; spiritual substance, and incorporeal essence; but, above all, the Christian divines and clergy. These, when he happens to meet with them, bring one of his fits upon him, and often set him a raving for several pages together. But I confess I too much dislike such a way of writing to make recriminations of this kind. And yet his lordship tells the divines of the *discretion of their adversaries*, and would have them *return it with discretion*. And he represents the *orthodox bullies*, as he calls them, as "affecting to triumph over men, who employ but part of their strength, as tiring them with impertinent paradoxes, and provoking them with unjust reflections, and often by the foulest language."¶

I am apt to think, that by this time you are weary of reading over such a heap of abusive reflections, so unbecoming any man of learn-

* Works, p. 484, 485.

† Ibid. vol. v. p. 474.

‡ Ibid. p. 369, 370.

§ Ibid. vol. iii. p. 515, 518, vol. v. p. 388.

¶ Ibid. p. 523.

|| Ibid. vol. iii. p. 272, 273.

ing and education, much more one so conversant in the polite world as Lord Bolingbroke has been. The transcribing them out of his Essays was no very agreeable employment. But they so often occur there, and make so remarkable a part of the works of this right honourable author, that it was absolutely necessary to take some notice of them. One thing may be safely collected from his writing after this manner, *viz.* that he had a very high opinion of the superiority of his own understanding, and a sovereign contempt for all those that were in different sentiments from him, whether philosophers, ancient or modern, or divines, but especially for the latter.

If we examine what foundation there is for these high pretensions, or what new and important discoveries this writer hath made in religion or philosophy, which may be of real use to mankind, the principal things in his scheme may be reduced to the following heads :

1. That there is one Supreme All-perfect Being, the eternal and original cause of all things, of almighty power and infinite wisdom ; but that we must not pretend to ascribe to him any moral attributes, distinct from his physical, especially holiness, justice, and goodness ; that he has not these attributes, according to the ideas we conceive of them, nor any thing equivalent to those qualities as they are in us ; and that to pretend to deduce moral obligations from those attributes, or to talk of imitating God in his moral attributes, is enthusiasm or blasphemy.

2. That God made the world, and established the laws of this system at the beginning ; but that he doth not now concern himself in the affairs of men ; or that if he doth, his providence only extendeth to collective bodies, but hath no regard to individuals, to their actions, or to the events that befall them.

3. That the soul is not a distinct substance from the body ; that the whole man is dissolved at death ; and that though it may be useful to mankind to believe the doctrine of future rewards and punishments, yet it is a fiction, which hath no real foundation in nature and reason ; and that to pretend to argue for future retributions from the apprehended unequal distributions of this present state, is absurd and blasphemous, and is to cast the most unworthy reflections on divine Providence.

4. That the law of nature is what reason discovereth to us concerning our duty as founded in the human system ; that it is clear and obvious to all mankind ; but has been obscured and perverted by ancient philosophers and modern divines ; that it has not been set in a proper light by those who have undertaken to treat of it ; and therefore he hath represented it in its genuine purity and simplicity ; and that the sanction of that law relate to men not individually, but collectively considered.

5. That from the clearness and sufficiency of the law of nature, it may be concluded, that God hath made no other revelation of his will to mankind ; and that there is no need or use for any extraordinary supernatural revelation.

6. That it is profane and blasphemous to ascribe the Jewish

Scriptures to revelation or inspiration from God; that the history contained there is false and incredible, and the scheme of religion taught in those writings is absolutely unworthy of God, and repugnant to his divine perfections.

7. That the New Testament consists of two different gospels, opposite to one another, that of Christ and that of St. Paul; that Christianity in its genuine simplicity, as taught by Jesus Christ, and contained in the evangelical writings, is a benevolent institution, and may be regarded as a republication of the law of nature, or rather of the theology of Plato; that the morals it teaches are pure, but no other than the philosophers had taught before, and that some of its precepts are not agreeable to the natural law; and some of its original doctrines, particularly those relating to the redemption of mankind by the death of Christ, and to future rewards and punishments, are absurd, and inconsistent with the attributes of God.

These appear to me to be the most remarkable things in the late Lord Bolingbroke's "Posthumous Works," as far as natural and revealed religion is concerned. And the method I propose to pursue in my observations upon them is this:

I shall first consider the attempts he hath made to subvert the main principles that lie at the foundation of all religion, viz., those relating to the moral attributes of God, a particular providence extending to the individuals of the human race, the immortality of the soul, and a future state of retributions. I shall next examine the account he hath given of the law of nature, and of the duties and sanctions of that law. After which it will be proper to consider what he hath offered concerning divine revelation in general, with a view to show that an extraordinary revelation of the will of God to mankind is absolutely needless, and that therefore we may conclude that God hath never given such a revelation at all. I shall proceed, in the next place, to a particular and distinct examination of the objections he hath urged against the truth and divine original of the Mosaic revelation, and the Scriptures of the Old Testament; and shall conclude with considering what more directly relateth to the Christian revelation properly so called, to its proofs and evidences, and to its laws and doctrines, all which he hath endeavoured to expose.

This I hope may be sufficient to answer the design I have in view, which is to obviate the principal mischiefs to religion, which Lord Bolingbroke's Works seem fitted to produce. Other things there are in these volumes, which might furnish matter for many reflections, but which I shall take little or no notice of, as they do not come within the compass of the plan I propose.

I am, &c.

LETTER XXIII.

Lord Bolingbroke asserts the Existence of God against the Atheists, but rejects the Argument *a priori*, and that drawn from the general Consent of Mankind.—He is for reducing all the divine Attributes to Wisdom and Power, and blames the Divines for distinguishing between the physical and moral Attributes.—He asserts, that we cannot ascribe Goodness and Justice to God, according to our Ideas of them, nor argue with any Certainty about them.—That it is absurd to deduce moral Obligations from the moral Attributes of God, or to pretend to imitate him in those Attributes.—Observations upon his Scheme.—It is shown, that the moral Attributes are necessarily included in the Idea of the absolutely perfect Being. The Author's Objections against ascribing those Attributes to God, or distinguishing them from his physical Attributes, particularly considered.—His manifold Inconsistencies and Contradictions.

SIR,

IN my last a general account was given of the scheme Lord Bolingbroke seems to have had in view in his Posthumous Works, and of the main principles to which it is reducible. I now proceed to a more distinct examination of those principles; and shall begin with that which lieth at the foundation of all religion, the existence and attributes of God. And it must be acknowledged, that his Lordship every-where in the strongest terms asserteth the existence of the one Supreme All-perfect Being, the Great Author of the universe. He represents this as *strictly demonstrable*, and treats the opinion of the atheists as *infinitely absurd*; and that they can *only cavil*, but *cannot reason*, against the existence of the first cause; of which, he thinks, we may be in reason as sure as of our own existence. There are several passages in his works, in which he expresseth himself devoutly with regard to the Supreme Being, and professeth seriously to adore him. And there are some instances of his addressing him with great solemnity, and in a religious manner.*

I need not take any notice of what he hath briefly offered for demonstrating the existence of a Deity.† He has said nothing on this head, but what has been frequently urged to great advantage by others before him; and particularly by Dr. Clarke, in what his Lordship is pleased to call his *pretended demonstration of the being and attributes of God*.‡

Our author indeed is for confining the proof to the argument *a posteriori*, and is for absolutely rejecting the argument *a priori*, whereas Dr. Clarke insists upon both; and I cannot help thinking that both may be highly useful; and that they are then most effectual, and come with the greatest force, when they come in aid of one another.

As Lord Bolingbroke rejects the argument *a priori* for the existence and perfections of God, so he seems not willing to allow that

* See particularly vol. iii. p. 247, 356. vol. v. p. 338, &c.

† Works, vol. iii. p. 353, 354.

‡ Ibid. p. 52.

which is drawn from the general consent of mankind. He says, it will indeed prove, that men generally believed a God, but not that such a Being exists; and he represents it as *trifling to insist upon it*.^{*} And in a letter occasioned by one of Archbishop Tillotson's sermons, vol. iii. p. 257, *and seq.* he finds fault with that great divine for making use of that argument, and disingenuously represents it, as if he had rested the proof of a Deity principally upon it;† which he is far from doing, though it must be acknowledged to be a consideration of great weight. He particularly blames the Archbishop for ascribing this consent to the nature of the human mind, on which God has impressed an innate idea of himself; but he owns, that afterwards he softens it by saying, that "the human mind is so disposed, that men may discover, in the due use of its faculties, that there is a God."‡ And he speaks of some divines who explain it thus; that the belief of God is founded on a certain natural proportion there is between this great truth and the conceptions of the human mind. But our author thinks, that "such a *natural and intimate proportion* between the existence of God, and the conceptions of the human mind, may appear chimerical, and perhaps is so;"§ and observes, that "polytheism was more conformable to the natural conceptions of the human mind, especially in the most ancient and ignorant ages, than the belief of One first intelligent Cause, the sole Creator, Preserver, and Governor of all things." Yet he afterwards declares, that "the idea of an All-wise and All-powerful Being, the first cause of all things, is so *proportionable to human reason*, that it must have been received into the minds of men, as soon as they began to contemplate the face of nature, and to exercise their reason in such contemplations."|| And in his reflections on M. Maupertuis, who had slighted the argument from the general consent of mankind, he observes, that "it is general enough to show *the proportion which this truth bears to the universal reason of mankind*."¶ You cannot but observe here, that he directly makes use of that manner of expression which he had before blamed others for using.

But it will be proper more distinctly to inquire into the idea this writer gives of God, and of the divine perfections. The only attributes of God which he insisteth upon as necessary to be known by us are, his power and wisdom. "We rise," says he, "from a knowledge of ourselves, and of the works of God, to a knowledge of his existence, and his *wisdom* and *power*, which we call infinite."** He blames those who presume to define the moral attributes of an All-perfect Being; and thinks "we ought to content ourselves to know that he exists by the necessity of his nature, and that his *wisdom* and *power* are infinite."†† He declares, that a "self-existent Being, the first Cause of all things, infinitely *powerful* and infinitely *wise*, is the God of natural theology; that as the whole system of the universe bears witness to this truth, so the whole system of natural

* Works, vol. iii. p. 247.

§ Ibid. p. 259, 260.

** Ibid. p. 88.

† Ibid. p. 258, 267.

|| Ibid. vol. iv. p. 195.

†† Ibid. vol. v. p. 235.

‡ Ibid. p. 258.

¶ Ibid. p. 256.

religion rests on it, and requires no broader foundation. These systems are God's systems."* We see here there is no mention made of the divine goodness, as included in the idea we form of a deity. Natural theology, or natural religion, requires no broader a foundation than the acknowledging the wisdom and power of God. And so it generally is in the account our author gives of God and his attributes; as if *optimus* were not to be joined with *maximus* in the deist's creed, or in the idea natural religion teaches us to form of God. And accordingly he finds fault with what he calls *artificial theology*, for pretending "to connect moral attributes, such as we conceive them, and such as they are relatively to us, with the physical attributes of God." He says, "there is no sufficient foundation for this proceeding in the phenomena of nature, and that in several cases they are repugnant." And he expressly mentions it among the wrong notions of the ancient theists, and which gave advantage to the atheists with regard to the question about the original of evil, that they maintained, that "God is just and good, and righteous, and holy, as well as powerful and wise." He blames them for saying, that "love was the first principle of things, and that it determined God to bring forth his creatures into existence;"† and that, as Seneca says, *usque ad delicias amamur*. And elsewhere quoting a passage of Dr. Clarke, in which God is represented as having a *tender and hearty concern for the happiness of man*, he says, "these are strange words to be applied to the Supreme Being."‡ And he argueth at great length against those who suppose, that God made man only to be happy.

He frequently censureth the divines for distinguishing between God's physical and moral attributes; and "cannot see one religious purpose, that this distinction is necessary to answer.§ God's moral attributes," he says, "can only be discerned in the works of God, and in the conduct of his providence; and that it is evident, they are not, cannot be so discerned in them, as to be the object of our imitation."|| He represents it as great presumption to pretend to deduce our moral obligations from the moral attributes of God; and that the absurdity of this cannot be too often exposed.¶ And after having asserted, that we cannot rise from our moral obligations to God's supposed moral attributes, he adds, that "he calls them *supposed*, because "after all that has been supposed to prove a necessary connection between his physical and moral attributes, we may observe them in his wisdom;—and that the effects of his wisdom give us sometimes ideas of those moral qualities, which we acquire by reflections on ourselves, and sometimes not."*** He thinks the divines are to be blamed, "for talking of God's infinite goodness and justice, as of his infinite wisdom and power;"†† and observes, that "every thing shows the wisdom and power of God, conformably to our ideas of wisdom and power, in the physical world and in the moral; but every thing does not show in like manner the justice

* Works, vol. v. p. 316.

† Ibid. p. 316, 317.

‡ Ibid. p. 63.

§ Ibid. p. 62. || Ibid. p. 63. ¶ Ibid. p. 87. *** Ibid. p. 86. †† Ibid. p. 528.

and goodness of God, conformably to our ideas of those attributes in either."* That "though the wisdom of God does not appear alike in all the phenomena, yet, as far as we can discover, it appears in the greatest and least to our astonishment, and none of them can be strained into a repugnancy to it; but the same cannot be said of the moral attributes which we ascribe to the Supreme Being, according to our ideas of them. It cannot be disputed, and all sides agree, that many of the phenomena are repugnant to our ideas of goodness and justice."† He declares it as his opinion, that "God's natural attributes absorb the moral;"‡ and particularly, that "the moral attributes of the Supreme Being are absorbed in his wisdom; and that we should consider them only as different modifications of his physical attributes; and must always talk precariously and impertinently, when we presume to apply our ideas of them to the appearances of things."§ And he chargeth the divines "as proceeding in all their reasonings about the nature, moral attributes, and will of God, not only without regard to the phenomena, but often in direct contradiction to them."||

This is not a matter that he treats merely in some occasional passages. The chief design of several of his fragments and essays in his fifth volume, particularly of the fourth, seventh, fortieth, forty-first, and forty-ninth, is to argue against those who assert the moral attributes of God as distinguished from his physical: or who say, that those moral attributes, his holiness, goodness, justice, and truth, are the same in him, that they are in the ideas we form of those perfections; which, he says, cannot be conceived *without manifest presumption and blasphemy*: upon this doctrine he chargeth men's *false conceptions and licentious reasonings* about the divine nature and providence. He adds, that "these *false conceptions and licentious reasonings* may proceed likewise from the *analogical doctrine*; which, though it ascribes not to God human notions, yet ascribes to him something, whatever it be, equivalent to them."¶ He affirms, that "goodness and justice in God—are something transcendent, and of which we cannot make any true judgment; and that it is impossible we should argue with any certainty about them."** I shall only farther observe, that he brings a charge in this respect, not only against the Christian divines, but against the heathen philosophers. The reason he assigns, why they were "unable to propagate natural religion, and to reform mankind, is because they proceeded in Dr. Clarke's method, to argue *a priori* from the moral attributes of God, his goodness, justice, &c. which they assumed to be the same in him that they are in our ideas."††

By comparing these several passages together, it appears, that, according to this writer, we are unable to form any idea of the moral attributes of God: for if we cannot conceive of them according to our ideas, we cannot form any conception of them at all: that it is wrong to distinguish them from his physical attributes, or to say

* Works, vol. v. p. 311. † Ibid. p. 368. ‡ Ibid. p. 313, 314. § Ibid. p. 335, 453.
|| Ibid. p. 310. ¶ Ibid. p. 541. ** Ibid. p. 311, 359, 360. †† Ibid. p. 234.

they are connected with those attributes: that there is not only no such thing in God as goodness or justice as we conceive of them, but nothing in him analogous or equivalent to those qualities as they are in us, or which is fitted to produce correspondent effects: that therefore it ought not to be said of God, that he is just and good, holy and true, or that he is a lover of mankind, or is concerned for our happiness, but only that he is powerful and wise: that we can only know God's moral attributes *a posteriori* from the effects, and that many of the phenomena in nature are repugnant to those attributes, and inconsistent with them: so that it is impossible for us to argue with any certainty about them. This is the plain intention of the passages which have been cited, and others might be produced to the same purpose; though we shall find him afterwards plainly contradicting several things which here he has advanced.

If we consider what his reason could be for setting up an hypothesis so contrary to true theism, for which yet he would be thought to have so great a zeal, there are two things which he appears to have had in view.

1. That we are in no case to deduce our moral obligations from the moral attributes of God, or to propose to imitate God in those attributes. He declares, that "the laws of nature are absurdly founded in the moral attributes of God;"* *i. e.* it is absurd to talk of his justice, goodness, righteousness and truth, as giving rise to those laws, or appearing in the constitution of them. And as to the pretence of imitating the Deity in his moral excellencies, this is what he openly and avowedly condemns. This particularly is the design of the fourth of his fragments and essays in his fifth volume. He expressly asserts, that "God's moral attributes cannot be so discerned by us as to be the objects of our imitation,"† He pronounces, that "it is absurd, and worse than absurd, to assert that man can imitate God, except in a sense so very remote, and so improper, that the expressions should never be used, much less such a duty recommended."‡ And that "those writers or preachers who exhort us to imitate God, must mean, not the God whom we see in his works, and in all that his providence orders; but the God who appears in their representations of him, and who is often such a God as no pious theist can acknowledge."§ He declares for himself, that he dares not use *theological familiarity, and talk of imitating God*; and treats that doctrine as *extravagant, false, and prophane.*|| He says, that "by assuming to imitate God, we give the strongest proof of the imperfection of our nature, whilst we neglect the real, and aspire to a mock honour, as pride, seduced by adulation, is prone to do; and as religious pride, wrought up by self-conceit into enthusiasm, does above all others."¶ And he mentions it as an instance of the impertinence of Socrates's doctrine, that "he conjured his auditors in the prison to make themselves as like as possible to their great exemplar, the Supreme Being."**

* Works, vol. v. p. 90.

|| Ibid. p. 44. 65.

† Ibid. p. 63.

¶ Ibid. p. 67.

‡ Ibid. p. 62.

§ Ibid. p. 64.

** Ibid. vol. iv. p. 117, 118.

Thus has this dogmatical and presumptuous author taken upon him to pass a severe and insolent censure upon that which has been the doctrine of the most excellent philosophers and moralists, and of one far superior to them all, our blessed Saviour himself. See Mat. v. 45. 48. Luke iv. 35, 36. And he has particularly instanced in God's causing his sun to shine on the evil and the good, and sending rain on the just and unjust, as a proof that we cannot and ought not to aspire after an imitation of him ;"* though our Lord sets this goodness of providence before us as a noble pattern, to engage us to an extensive benevolence, and that we should be ready to do good even to our enemies themselves. There are indeed depths in God's providential dispensations, with regard to which we cannot pretend to imitate him, for want of knowing the reasons upon which he proceeds ; but this does not hinder, but that we may and ought to endeavour to resemble him in his illustrious moral excellencies, as far as we can discern them in his works and in the revelations of his word, which in many instances we are able to do.

2. Another thing which he hath evidently in view, in denying that we can have any idea of the moral attributes of God, so as to make a true judgment of them, or to argue with any certainty about them, is to destroy the argument which is drawn from the consideration of these moral attributes, to show the probability of a future state of retributions. For if God be perfectly good and just, this leads us to conclude that he will order it so, that in the final issue of things, a remarkable distinction shall be made between the righteous and the wicked ; and that virtue shall upon the whole be crowned with its due reward, and vice meet with condign punishment : and since this is not uniformly done in this present state, it is reasonable to believe that there shall be a future state of rewards and punishments. This is a way of arguing, which, by his own acknowledgment, has been urged by some of the best and wisest men in all ages. To avoid this consequence, he will not allow that there is any such thing as justice and goodness in God according to our ideas, or any thing answering to what we call justice and goodness : and that it is presumption in us to determine what those attributes require that God should do.† And indeed to guard against this seems to have been a principal point with his lordship. It is for this that he denies, that providence extendeth its care to the individuals of the human race : and one of his chief prejudices against the Christian revelation appears to me to be its setting these things in so strong a light.

You easily perceive, that this part of our author's scheme is not of a trifling nature. It is not a mere speculative error, but which, pursued to its proper consequences, must have a mighty influence on religion and morals. I shall therefore examine it distinctly, and shall first offer some general considerations concerning God's moral attributes, to show that they must necessarily be ascribed to the Supreme Being : and then shall proceed to obviate the principal ob-

* Works, vol. v. p. 63.

† Ibid. p. 453,

jections he hath advanced : after which I shall point to the manifold inconsistencies and contradictions he hath fallen into in relation to this subject.

I shall begin with some general considerations concerning God's moral attributes.

And 1. It is essential to the idea of God, that he is the *all-perfect* Being. So our author frequently calls him, and makes it necessary for us to regard him under that notion.* That is a remarkable declaration which he makes Vol. III. p. 299. "I know, for I can demonstrate by connecting the clearest and most distinct of my real ideas, that there is a God, a first intelligent cause of all things, whose infinite wisdom and power appear evidently in all his works, and to whom therefore I ascribe most rationally every other perfection, whether conceivable or not conceivable by me." Here he mentions distinctly, as his manner is, God's *infinite wisdom and power*, and takes no particular notice of his goodness; but surely this must be supposed to be included, when he adds, that not only wisdom and power, but *every other perfection conceivable by us*, must be most rationally ascribed to God. For is not goodness a perfection? And is it not conceivable by us? Yea, is it not the most amiable of all perfections, and that which gives a lustre and glory to all the rest? Is it possible to conceive a perfect character without it? Almighty power and infinite wisdom, if they could be supposed separated from goodness and righteousness, in the great Governor of the world, would create horror and aversion instead of love and esteem. A God destitute of justice and goodness would be such a God, as he most wrongfully represents the God of Moses and St. Paul to be, an unjust, a cruel, a partial, and arbitrary Being!†

He is sensible, that in our ideas of perfection, goodness and righteousness, or his moral attributes, are necessarily included : and that consequently according to the rule he had laid down, *viz.* that it is *rational* for us to ascribe to God every perfection, whether *conceivable or inconceivable by us*, we ought most certainly to ascribe to him righteousness, goodness, and truth. He endeavours therefore to guard against this by saying, though in plain contradiction to what he had before advanced :—"Let us not measure his perfections by ours. Let us not presume so much as to ascribe our perfections to him, even according to the highest conceptions we are able to form of them; though we reject every imperfection conceivable by us, when it is imputed to him."‡ He observes, that "the first and strongest impressions that we receive of benevolence, justice, and other moral virtues, come from reflections on ourselves and others; from what we feel in ourselves, and from what we observe in other men. These we acknowledge to be, however limited and imperfect, the excellencies of our own nature, and therefore conceiving them without any limitation or perfection, we ascribe them to the Divine." But he says, "a very short analysis of the excellencies of our own nature will be sufficient to show, that they cannot

* Works, vol. iii. p. 253.

† Ibid. vol. v. p. 567.

‡ Ibid. vol. iii. p. 558.

world: with regard to which he observes, that "Adam himself could only have related to him some of the circumstances of the sixth day, but nothing that preceded this." It will be easily allowed, that the account of this must have been originally owing to extraordinary revelation. And very worthy it was of the divine wisdom to grant such a revelation to the first parents and ancestors of the human race, since it was a matter of great importance to mankind to be well acquainted with it; and our author himself owns, that "it leads men to acknowledge a Supreme Being, by a proof levelled to the meanest understanding."* And it may be justly concluded, that the account of this was transmitted with great care from our first parents to their descendants, and preserved among the most religious of them: which might the better be done, if, as is very probable, the observance of the seventh day was appointed from the beginning to preserve the memorial of it. So that the preservation of this very important tradition may be accounted for, even abstracting from Moses's divine inspiration, which, if in any thing tradition had become imperfect, might easily enable him to supply the defects of it.

Another objection, on which his Lordship seems to lay a great stress, for invalidating the authority of the Mosaic history, is, that the principal facts are not confirmed by collateral testimony: and by collateral testimony he understands, the testimony of those who had no common interest of country, religion, or profession.† But such collateral testimony as this is no way necessary to the authenticity of history. Many histories are very reasonably believed which have no such collateral testimony to confirm them. Such testimony is frequently not to be had, nor could reasonably be expected with relation to many of the facts recorded by Moses. As to that part of the Mosaic history, which relateth to the times of greatest antiquity, little help can be expected from collateral testimony, since there is no history of those times now extant so ancient as his own. And yet there are considerable traces of tradition which have been preserved among other nations, concerning some of the most remarkable events during that period, as hath been often shown by learned men;‡ especially with relation to that which is the most extraordi-

* Works, vol. iii. p. 253.

† Ibid. p. 281, 282.

‡ His Lordship frequently speaks with great contempt of the attempts made by the learned to support the history of Moses by collateral testimonies, those of Egyptians, Phœnicians, Chaldeans, and even Greeks. See particularly vol. iii. p. 280, 281. Yet he says, "The man who gives the least credit to the Mosaic history, will agree very readily, that these five books contain traditions of a very great antiquity; some of which were preserved and propagated by other nations as well as the Israelites, and by other historians as well as Moses. Many of them may be true, though they will not serve as vouchers for one another." And he farther observes, that "three or four ancient neighbouring nations, of whom we have some knowledge, seemed to have a common fund of traditions, which they varied according to their different systems of religion, philosophy, and policy." Ibid. p. 282. And since he here supposes, that the nations he refers to had different systems of religion and policy, and were evidently neither of the same country, nation, or religion, with the people of Israel, the testimonies they give to the facts recorded in the Mosaic writings may be justly regarded as collateral testimony, even according to the account he himself is pleased to give of it. viz. that it is the testimony of those who had no common interest of country, religion, or

nary of them all, the universal deluge. Nor can any thing be more false and contrary to known fact, than what this writer boldly affirms, that "the tradition of Noah's deluge is vouched by no other authority than that of Moses; and that the memory of that catastrophe was known only to one people, and preserved in one corner of the earth."* Not only has there been a general tradition in confirmation of it,† but there are many proofs of it all over the earth, many phænomena which plainly lead us to acknowledge that there has been such a deluge, and which cannot otherwise be reasonably accounted for.

With respect to that part of the history which relateth to the laws given to the Israelites, and the extraordinary facts whereby the authority of those laws was established, they were not only things of which Moses had certain knowledge, and in which he could not be mistaken, but they were of a most public nature, and to which the whole nation were witnesses. The facts were of such a kind, that the accounts of them could not possibly have been imposed by Moses at that time upon the people, if they had not been true, nor could they have been made to believe that they were done before their eyes, if they had not been done. And these facts having been all along from that time received by that people, together with the laws in confirmation of which they were wrought, furnisheth a proof of authenticity to this part of the Mosaic history, which can scarce be paralleled in any other.

I do not see how the force of this can be avoided, supposing Moses to be the author of the Pentateuch. But this is what Lord Bolingbroke thinks cannot be proved. He has made a kind of representation after his own way of what Mr. Abbadie has offered to this purpose; and adds, that it would be hard to find an example of greater trifling.‡ But whosoever will take pains to examine

profession. So that after all his clamours against the Mosaic history for want of *collateral testimony*, he himself in effect owns, that, in several instances at least, and with regard to some of the facts there related, collateral testimonies may be produced, which therefore are very properly taken notice of by the learned. These testimonies relate to several things in the Mosaic account of the creation. The long lives of the first men—the general deluge, with some of the remarkable particulars recorded by Moses relating to it—the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah—the excellent character of Abraham, and several particulars in his life, and that of Isaac and Jacob—Joseph's being envied by his brethren, and sold into Egypt—his great advancement there, and wise administration, and preserving Egypt in a time of famine—many things relating to Moses himself—his great wisdom—his being opposed by the Egyptian magicians—his leading the Israelites out of Egypt, whilst the Egyptians who pursued them were compelled to desist—his bringing them through the deserts of Arabia to Mount Sinai—the law given by him as from God—his noble notions of the Deity, and prohibiting the representing or worshipping him by any corporeal images—many of the peculiarities of that law, different from those of other nations. The reader may see most of these things collected by *Grotius de Verit. Relig. Christ.* lib. i. sec. 16. I think any impartial person will be of opinion, that there is as much collateral testimony as could be reasonably expected concerning things of such remote antiquity, and from persons who were not of the Jewish nation or religion, and several of whom were professed enemies to both.

* Works, vol. iii. p. 224.

† See concerning this, *Grotius de Verit. Relig. Christ.* lib. i. sec. 16. See also *Revelation examined with Candour*, part i. dissert. 13, 14.

‡ Works, vol. iii. p. 275, 276.

the argument, not as he is pleased to represent it, but as it stands in Mr. Abbadie's own book, will find how little he has offered that can in any degree take off the force of his reasoning. Indeed it is hard to know what greater proof can reasonably be desired of Moses's being the author of the Pentateuch than is given. The whole nation, among whom those books have been always received with great veneration, as containing the most authentic accounts of their history and their laws, have constantly attributed them to Moses. All those of foreign nations that have mentioned their history or their laws, have always supposed Moses to have been the author of them. Never has it been denied till these latter ages, after so long a possession, upon some cavils and exceptions, which are really trifling, and which have been sufficiently answered. And if all this will not be allowed to be a proof, it is impossible that any thing of this nature should ever be proved. It hath all the proof which the nature of the thing can admit of; and it would be unreasonable, by Lord Bolingbroke's own acknowledgment, to demand more. "Common sense," saith he, "requires that every thing proposed to the understanding, should be accompanied with such proof as the nature of it can furnish. He who requires more, is guilty of absurdity; he who requires less, of rashness."*

There is then all the evidence which can be desired in such a case, that the books containing the original history and laws given to the people of Israel were written by Moses, as the whole nation to whom the history belonged, and who were governed by those laws, and received them as the rule of their polity, have constantly affirmed. And of this they must be allowed to be competent witnesses. His Lordship indeed, with a view to show how little the testimony of the Jews is to be depended upon, and how easily those laws might be imposed upon them, mentions the little time that it took to establish the divine authority of the Alcoran among the Arabs, a people not more incapable to judge of Mahomet and his book, than we may suppose the Israelites to have been to judge of Moses and his book, if he left any, whether of law alone, or of history and law both.† But this observation is little to the purpose. The Arabians were sufficient vouchers, that the Alcoran was the book left them by Mahomet, containing the revelations he pretended to have received from heaven. In this they are to be credited. So are the Jews, that the books containing the original history and laws of their nation were written by Moses. As to the divine authority of those laws, this must be tried by other arguments. But however stupid we may suppose the Arabians to have been, it would not have been in the power of Mahomet to have made them believe, that they themselves had heard his laws distinctly delivered with the most amazing solemnity from heaven in the presence of above six hundred thousand men, if there had been no such thing: or that he wrought a series of stupendous miracles before their eyes, if he had not done so. And accordingly he was too wise to put the proof of his own

* Works, vol. iii. p. 246.

† Ibid. p. 278.

divine mission, or of the authority of his laws, upon facts of such a nature; which would have been the most effectual way he could have taken to detect and expose his own imposture. But he pretended to have received communications and revelations from heaven, the truth of which depended upon his own credit. The same observation may be made concerning those celebrated lawgivers of antiquity, who pretended to have received their laws from the gods, as Minos, Numa, and others. None of them ever put the proof of the divine authority of their laws upon public facts of the most miraculous and extraordinary nature, done in the presence of all the people, and for the truth of which they appealed to them. They pretended to directions from oracles, or to secret communications with the deity, of which the people had no proof, and which they received solely upon their authority. But Moses put the proof of the divine authority of his laws upon sensible facts, of the most public nature, and of which the whole body of the people, to whom these laws were given, were witnesses. Appeals were made to the people, at the time when these laws were delivered, concerning those facts as done in their sight, and which they themselves could not possibly deny. The accounts of those facts are so interwoven with the laws, that they cannot be separated. Some of the principal motives to engage the people to an observance of those laws are founded on those facts. Many of the laws were peculiarly designed to preserve the remembrance of the facts, and cannot be otherwise accounted for than by supposing the truth of those facts to which they relate. And this was the professed design of the institution of several of their sacred rites, which were appointed to be solemnly observed by the whole of the nation, in every age from the beginning of their polity, *i. e.* from the time when they first received these laws, and their constitution was established. There were several public monuments, which subsisted several ages, to perpetuate the memory of the most remarkable of those facts. The people were commanded, as by divine authority, frequently to consider those facts, and to take care to transmit them to their children. To which it may be added, that in all the remaining writings published at different times, and in different ages, among that nation, whether of an historical, moral, or devotional kind, there is a constant reference to those facts as of undoubted credit and authority. They are repeated on so many different occasions, so often and solemnly appealed to, that it appeareth, with the utmost evidence which the thing is capable of, that these facts have been all along universally known and acknowledged, and the remembrance of them constantly kept up among that people. And upon the truth and authority of these facts, their peculiar constitution, whereby they were so remarkably distinguished from all other nations, was plainly founded; nor can it well be conceived, how it could have been established among them without those facts. It strengthens all this, when it is considered, that scarce ever was there any people so well fitted by their constitution for preserving and transmitting the remembrance of their laws and facts, as the people of Israel. Their weekly Sabbath,

calls it, "the revelation God has made of his will by his works. And what is the will of God," saith he, "is a question easily answered. To answer this, we need go no higher than the moral obligations that arise in our own system, and of which we have very adequate ideas. The nature of the human system is independent on man, and yet he is obliged to derive the rules of his conduct from it. By employing our reason to collect the will of God from the fund of our nature physical and moral, and by contemplating frequently and seriously the laws that are plainly and necessarily deducible from them, we may acquire not only a particular knowledge of those laws, but a general, and, in some sort, an habitual knowledge of the manner in which God is pleased to exercise his supreme power in this system, beyond which we have no concern."*

This law he represents as absolutely certain, and obvious to all mankind. "Natural revelation (for so," saith he, "I will call it) produces knowledge, a series of intuitive knowledge from the first principles to the last conclusions. The phenomena of nature are the first principles; and reason, *i. e.* a real divine illumination, leads us from one necessary truth to another, through the whole course of these demonstrations.—In all these cases we know, we do not believe."† He asserts, that "we more certainly know the will of God in this way than we can know it in any other."‡ "And that the tables of the natural law are hung up in the works of God, and are obvious to the sight of all men, so obvious that no man who is able to read the plainest characters can mistake them."§ And accordingly he declares, that "the will of God, signified by the law of nature, and revealed by his works, is a revelation that admits of no doubt, and shows the road to happiness to all mankind."|| I shall only mention one passage more, among many that might be produced to the same purpose. Having asserted, that "natural religion is the original revelation which God has made of himself, and of his will, to all mankind in the constitution of things, and in the order of his providence; he observes, that human reason is able to discover in the original revelation every conceivable duty that we owe to God as our Creator, and to man as our fellow creature: that this system of duty is fully proportioned by infinite wisdom to the human state, and the end of its human happiness.—Natural religion therefore is relatively perfect; it is immutable; as long as God and man continue to be what they are, and to stand in the same relations to one another." He adds, "if it does not follow necessarily from this, sure I am that it follows probably, that God has made no other revelation of himself and of his will to mankind."¶ This is evidently the main point our author had in view, in extolling so mightily as he has done the absolute perfection, certainty, and clearness of the law of nature.

From the several passages which have been produced, it appears, that by the law of nature he understands what we may collect by

* Works, vol. v. p. 100. 154. 178. 196, 271. † Ibid. vol. iv. p. 276. ‡ Ibid. p. 287.
§ Ibid. v. p. 153. || Ibid. p. 196. ¶ Ibid. p. 543, 544.

Our author is very willing to have it believed, that these writings were forged after the time of Moses; and the time he seems to fix upon as the likeliest for such a forgery is that of the Judges.* But there is not the least foundation for such a supposition. To suppose them to have been forged in the time of Joshua, or the elders that immediately succeeded him, is the same thing as to suppose them to have been forged in the days of Moses himself. It must then have been very well known, whether these were the laws that were given by Moses, and whether the facts there referred to as things of public notoriety, and known to the whole nation, were really done or not; since great numbers must have been able to contradict or detect them, if they had been false: and after the death of Joshua, and the elders that had lived in the time of Moses, and seen those mighty acts, who could have had authority enough to have imposed those laws and facts upon the people? The deliverance out of Egypt, the sojourning of the Israelites in the wilderness, the laws and constitutions appointed by Moses in the name of God, the extraordinary facts said to have been wrought by him, their introduction into Canaan, and the manner of their settlement there, must have been comparatively fresh in their remembrance. It appears by Jephthah's answer to the king of the Ammonites, that the people of Israel were in his time very well acquainted with their own history, and with what had happened to them in the time of Moses, Judges xi. 12, &c. The same thing appears from the Song of Deborah, ch. v. 4, 5, and from the answer of Gideon, ch. vi. 13. And it cannot without great absurdity be supposed, that they could at that time have had a body of laws imposed upon them as the laws of Moses, and laws by which their nation had been governed ever since his time, though they had not known those laws before: or, that they could have been made to believe, that the facts referred to in those books were facts of which their whole nation had been witnesses, and which they themselves had received from their ancestors, and the memory of which had been constantly preserved among

* His Lordship is pleased to observe, that "the four centuries the Israelites passed under their Judges, may be well compared to the heroical" (by which he understands the fabulous) "ages of the Greeks." The reason he gives for this is pretty extraordinary. He says, "those of the Greeks were generally bastards of some god or other; and those of the Jews were always appointed by God to defend his people, and destroy their enemies." As if the being a bastard of some god or other, and the being appointed by God for delivering and defending his people, were of the same signification, and equally absurd and fabulous: though under such a polity as the Mosaic was, their having their Judges and deliverers extraordinarily raised and appointed by God, had nothing in it but what was perfectly agreeable to the nature of their constitution. And whereas he mentions it to the disadvantage of the Jewish history under that period, that we there read of Ehud *an assassin*, and Jephthah *a robber*, and David *a captain of banditti*, it may be observed, that this last does not properly belong to the times of the Judges, and is only thrown in out of his great good will to the memory of that illustrious prince; and as to the two former, without entering into a particular consideration of the accounts which are given of them,† it may be justly affirmed, that these instances do not afford a shadow of a proof, that the history is fabulous, and doth not contain a true account of facts.

† See concerning Ehud, Answer to Christianity as old as the Creation. Vol. ii. p. 334. 2d edit.

them, though they had never heard of these facts : or, that such and such sacred rites and ordinances had been instituted, and constantly observed and solemnized in their nation, in remembrance of those facts, if till then they had been utter strangers to the observance of those rites. And what renders this still more improbable is, that during that period there was for the most part no general governor who had authority over the whole, as the kings had afterwards. The several tribes seem to have been very much in a state of independency, and to have had the government within themselves. Few of their Judges exercised an authority over all the tribes; nor were any of them priests till the time of Eli. In such a state of things, how was it possible to have imposed a new body of laws and history upon the whole nation, especially laws so different from the laws and customs of all other countries, and which enacted the severest penalties against the idolatries to which the neighbouring nations were so strongly addicted, and which the Israelites were so prone to imitate? If some of the tribes had received them, what likelihood is there that all would have done so, or would have regarded them as the laws of Moses, and as obligatory on the whole community, when they were so contrary to their own inclinations, and had never been imposed upon their nation before? Nothing less than such an authority as that which Moses claimed in the name of God himself, and which was enforced by such illustrious divine attestations, could have prevailed with them to have submitted to those laws, or to have received those facts. To which it may be added, that it is manifest from the account given in the book of Judges, which is the only account of that time that we have to depend upon, that the general state of things during that period was this : the people frequently fell into a compliance with the idolatrous rites of the neighbouring countries; but when public calamities befel them, and which they regarded as punishments upon them for their transgressions of their law, they were made sensible of their guilt, and again returned to the observance of it, and to the adoration of the only true God as there prescribed; and they were encouraged by the great things God had formerly done for their nation, to apply to him for deliverance from their oppressors. So that every thing during that period shows, that the law of Moses, and the worship of God and of him alone, free from idolatry and polytheism, was then the established constitution, which they themselves regarded as of divine authority, notwithstanding they too often suffered themselves to be seduced into deviations from it.

After the era of the Judges followed that of the Kings. King David lived very early in that period; and it appears with the utmost evidence, from the history and writings of that great prince, that the law of Moses was then held in the highest veneration, as of divine authority, and that the facts there recorded were universally believed and acknowledged; and though some of the succeeding Kings deviated from that law into the idolatries of their neighbouring nations, yet that law never lost its authority, and the observance of it was soon restored. The design of the prophets, of whom there

was a succession during that period, was to keep the people close to the observance of that law : and the extraordinary facts by which the authority of it was established, were still had in remembrance : and on the credit of that law, and of those extraordinary facts, they still looked upon themselves to be God's peculiar people. This writer indeed takes upon him to assert, that "there were times when they had actually no body of law among them, particularly in the reign of Josiah, when it had been long lost."* But there is no ground to suppose, that ever there was a time under any of their Kings, when they had actually no body of laws among them, or that the book of the law of Moses had been ever entirely lost. This cannot be justly concluded from the surprise expressed at Hilkiah's the High Priest's finding the book of the law of the Lord in the temple, when they repaired it in Josiah's reign ; for this is justly supposed to be either the original book of the law written by Moses himself, and ordered to be lodged in a coffer at the side of the ark, and which was found when the ark was removed, on occasion of the temple and holy of holies being repaired ; or at least an authentic copy of great antiquity and authority, kept in the temple, and which might have been neglected, or thought to have been lost. But it would be absurd to imagine, that there was no copy of the law at all remaining in any private hands, or in the hands of any of the priests or prophets. And it may very reasonably be conceived, that upon finding an authentic book of the law of such venerable antiquity, the attention of the King and great men might be more thoroughly awakened to the things contained there, and they might make a much stronger impression upon them, than they had ever done before, even supposing they had read or heard the same things out of some other copy of the law, of less authority, and which was not so much to be depended upon. There is not one word in the account that is given us of this matter, of what our author mentions, concerning the little time the reading of the book in the presence of the King took up ; from whence he concludes, that it contained nothing but the law strictly so called, or the recapitulation of it in the book of Deuteronomy : though if that copy had contained no more than the book of Deuteronomy, this is a collection not only of the principal laws given by Moses, but of the extraordinary and miraculous facts whereby the divine authority of the law was attested. As to what he insinuates, that all the sacred writings of the Jews were composed after the captivity, and that Esdras and his successors compiled the written law,† I shall not add any thing here to what I have elsewhere offered to demonstrate the palpable falsehood and absurdity of such a supposition.‡ I shall only at present observe, that the preserving of the Pentateuch among the Samaritans, between whom, from the time of their first settling in that country, and the Jews, there was a fixed antipathy and opposition, affordeth a plain proof, that the code of the Mosaic history

* Works, vol. iii. p. 276.

† Ibid. vol. iv. p. 339. vol. v. p. 229.

‡ See "Reflections on Lord Bolingbroke's Letters on the Study and Use of History," p. 51, & seq.

and laws was not the invention or composition of Esdras, but had been preserved among the Israelites of the ten tribes, in place of whom the Samaritans came. And the remarkable conformity there is between the Samaritan and Jewish code of the Pentateuch, both in the laws and in the facts, gives a signal confirmation of the antiquity and integrity of the Mosaic history and laws, and how far the Hebrew code is to be depended upon.

But to proceed to Lord Bolingbroke's farther objections. In order to destroy the credit of the Mosaic history, he hath taken all occasions to charge it with inconsistencies and contradictions. Thus he tells us, that the Mosaic account is plainly inconsistent with itself, in supposing that the unity of God was the original tradition derived from Adam, and yet that it was lost, and polytheism established in its stead in the days of Serah; or at least of Terah and Abraham, four hundred years after the deluge. He thinks it absurd to suppose, "that the knowledge of the existence of that God who had destroyed and restored the world, just before, could be wholly lost in the memory of mankind, and his worship entirely forgot, whilst the eye-witnesses of the deluge were yet alive."* The whole force of this objection depends upon his own absurd way of stating the case, as if the knowledge of the only true God were supposed to be then entirely lost and forgotten among mankind. True religion and the true worship of God might have been considerably corrupted in that time, and idolatry might have made a great progress, though the knowledge of the true God was not entirely lost and forgotten among men; as our author himself, when it is for his purpose, thinks fit to own.

With the same view of proving inconsistencies on the Mosaic history, he observes, that "it is repugnant to human nature to suppose, that the Israelites should, in the course of so few generations, become confirmed and hardened idolators in Egypt, and should in so short a time not only forget the traditions of their fathers, and the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob; but that they should have been as much wedded to idolatry as the Egyptians themselves were."† He himself furnishes an answer to this, when he observes, that "polytheism and idolatry have a close connection with the ideas and affections of rude and ignorant men." And that "the vulgar embrace polytheism and idolatry very easily, even after the true doctrine of a divine unity has been taught and received."‡ It may well be conceived, that during their abode in Egypt the Israelites might have contracted a great fondness for the Egyptian customs. They might be allured by the power and splendour of the Egyptians, to entertain a good opinion of their religion; and the extreme misery and distress to which they were reduced by their servitude, might lead many of them to question the promises made to Abraham and their ancestors, and make them more ready to deviate from the religion derived to them from their fathers; though there is no reason to think they entirely forgot it, but mixed idolatrous rites with it.

* Works, vol. vi. p. 19, 20, 217, 218.

† Ibid. p. 222, 223.

‡ Ibid. p. 21, 22.

And even after their deliverance from Egypt, the idolatrous habits and customs many of them had so deeply imbibed, were not soon laid aside. It may easily be supposed, that they would endeavour to reconcile and unite them with the religion Moses taught them. And this seems particularly to have been the case with regard to the worship of the golden calf. He mentions it as an incredible thing, that "they forgot the true God even when he conducted them through the desert: they revolted from him even whilst the peals of thunder that proclaimed his descent on the mountain rattled in their ears, and whilst he dictated his laws to them."* He adds, that "if the miracles recorded to have been wrought had been really wrought, nothing less than the greatest of all miracles could have made these real miracles ineffectual." "I know farther," says he, "most intuitively, that no creature of the same nature as I am of, and I presume the Israelites were human creatures, could resist the evidence of such revelations, such miracles, and such traditions, as are recorded in the Bible: That they must have terrified the most audacious, and have convinced the most incredulous."† Thus, with a view to destroy the credit of the Mosaic history, he cries up the irresistible force of the revelations and miracles wrought among the Israelites. But perhaps he could not be so sure, as he pretends, what he himself might have done in those circumstances. There is scarce any answering for the extravagance and inconsistencies which human nature may fall into. But he goes all along upon a wrong supposition, as he had done before, as if the Israelites had entirely forgotten God, or intended absolutely to abandon his worship. This was not their intention in the instance he seems to have had particularly in his view, their worshipping the golden calf. For it is evident, they did not design to renounce the one true God, the God of Israel, and to discard his worship. This appears from Aaron's proclaiming on that occasion a feast to the Lord, *Jehovah*; and from the people's declaring, *These be thy Gods, O Israel*; or, as it is elsewhere rendered, *This is thy God, that brought thee out of the land of Egypt*, Exod. xxxii. 4, 5, compared with Nehem. ix. 18. Nothing can be plainer than that they intended by it to worship the God of Israel, who they knew had so lately brought them out of the land of Egypt; and that the worship they rendered to the calf was not designed to terminate there, but was done with a reference to the Lord *Jehovah*, whom they were for worshipping by that symbol. They might therefore flatter themselves, that this was consistent with their acknowledging no other God but one, which had been so solemnly enjoined them; and that the prohibition of bowing down before any image was designed only to forbid the worshipping false gods, not the true God by such a symbol. This indeed was an excusable contravention of the law, which had been just promulgated with great solemnity, and which was intended to forbid their worshipping and bowing down before any image of the Deity, under any pretence whatsoever. But it was what minds, so strongly pre-

* Works, vol. iv. p. 223.

† Ibid. p. 225.

nature its obligation, which, as shall be shown, is what Lord Bolingbroke avows: upon these principles, if in any particular instance an unjust action may turn to his own advantage, and he knows he is safe in committing it, he is justified in doing that action, when a strict regard to justice, or fidelity to his word and promise, would do him hurt. For his present advantage and interest in this uncertain life is what he is to have principally in view, and to which every thing else must be subordinate.

In the eleventh of his *Fragments and Essays*, in which he particularly treats of sociability, he observes, that "it is owing to our being determined by self-love to seek our pleasure and utility in society; and that when these ends are sufficiently answered, natural sociability declines, and natural insociability commences. The influence of self-love reaches no farther; and when men are once formed into societies, those societies become individuals, and thus self-love, which promoted union among men, promotes discord among them."* So that, according to him, self-love first produces sociableness, and puts men upon forming societies; and when societies are once formed, this same self-love produces unsociableness and discord between those societies. And if this be the case, I cannot see how he can maintain, as he sometimes does, that universal benevolence flows from self-love, when, according to his account of it, it is only a very limited sociableness which is produced by self-love; and self-love, instead of promoting an universal benevolence, destroys it.

With regard to the particular duties included in the law of nature, there is little in these *Essays* that can be of use, either to show what those duties are, or how they are deducible from that law. What he saith on this head is for the most part very general.

As to the duties we owe to God, he observes, that "the religion and law of nature shows us the Supreme Being manifested in all his works to be the true and only object of our adoration; and that it teaches us to worship him in spirit and in truth, that is, inwardly and sincerely." But he seems to confine the worship prescribed in that law to inward worship. He adds, that "in the existence God has given us, and in the benefits which attach us strongly to it, this shows him to be the first and greatest object of our gratitude: and in the established order of things, subject to so many vicissitudes, and yet so constant, this religion shows him to be the reasonable as well as necessary object of our resignation: and finally, in the wants, distresses, and dangers which those vicissitudes bring frequently upon us, to be the comfortable object of our hope—in which hope, the religion of nature will teach us no doubt to address ourselves to the Almighty, in a manner consistent with an entire resignation to his will, as some of the heathens did."† These are undoubtedly important duties. But it is not easy to see what plea there is for making God the comfortable object of our hope in the wants, distresses, and dangers we are exposed to, or for

* Works, vol. v. p. 115.

† Ibid. p. 97, 98.

bouring nations in that part of the world ; but it also appears, with invincible evidence, that the body of that people were not infected with those distempers, and that there were comparatively very few who were so ; since the infected were ordered to be put out of the camp, and were treated in such a way as they could not have been treated, if a great part of the people had been leprous. But any story is caught at, however void of all appearance of truth, that tends to cast disgrace upon the Jews, and the holy scriptures.

The only remaining objection against the Mosaic history, and which indeed seems to be what he layeth the principal stress upon, is, that it is repugnant to the experience of mankind. That “incredible anecdotes are not mentioned seldom or occasionally in them, as in Livy or other historians, but the whole history is founded on such, and consists of little else.” He compares those that speak of the Pentateuch as an authentic history to Don Quixote, and represents them as *not much less mad than he* was. “When I sit down (says he) to read this history, I am ready to think myself transported into a sort of fairy land, where every thing is done by magic and enchantment ; where a system of nature very different from ours prevails ; and all I meet with is repugnant to my experience, and to the clearest and most distinct ideas I have. Almost every event in it is incredible in its causes or consequences, and I must accept or reject the whole.”* What his Lordship says amounts in other words to this : that this history gives an account of a series of miraculous facts and events, which were not according to the usual and ordinary course of things. This will be easily acknowledged. But it is denied, that this is a just or sufficient objection against the truth or authenticity of the history, or a valid reason why it should be rejected. On the contrary, if the facts there related had been only of the ordinary kind, they would not have answered the end which the divine wisdom had in view. It was necessary, as the case was circumstanced, that they should be miraculous, and therefore their being miraculous is not a proof of their being false ; and, considered in their causes and consequences, they are so far from being incredible, that, taking in their causes and consequences, they claim our belief and veneration. The way of arguing made use of by our author, and others of the deistical writers in such cases, deserves to be remarked. If the facts advanced in proof of a divine revelation may possibly be accounted for in a natural way, then they are no miracles at all, and cannot give a sufficient attestation to the truth and authority of a supernatural revelation ; and if they are of an extraordinary nature, and out of the common course of our experience, and manifestly transcend all human power, then the very extraordinariness of the facts, and their being miraculous, though it is proper in such circumstances they should be so, is made a reason for rejecting them.

But that we may consider this matter more distinctly, it is to be observed, that it cannot be pretended, that the facts recorded in the

* Works, vol. iii. p. 280.

books of Moses are absolutely impossible, or beyond the power of God to effect. If any reason therefore can be assigned to show, that it was proper they should be wrought, and that it was worthy of the divine wisdom to interpose in so extraordinary a way, those facts, however miraculous they are supposed to be, become credible. And if to this it be added, that we have all the proofs that these facts were actually done, which the nature of the thing can admit of, or which could be reasonably desired, supposing those things to have really happened, this is all that can be justly expected, and it would be unreasonable to insist on more.

The case that is here supposed is this : That when the nations had fallen from the worship and adoration of the one true God, and him only, and became involved in superstition, polytheism, and idolatry, which was still growing and spreading, and in danger of becoming universal, it pleased God, in his great wisdom and goodness, in order to put a check to the spreading idolatry, and to preserve his knowledge and worship among men, to interpose in an extraordinary way, by establishing among a people chosen for that purpose a constitution of a peculiar kind, the fundamental principle of which was the acknowledgment and adoration of the one true God, in opposition to all idolatry and polytheism. And, in order to give weight to this constitution, it was so ordered, that its divine authority was confirmed by a series of wonderful acts, which exhibited the most illustrious displays of his divine power and glory. And this constitution was designed farther to prepare the way for another dispensation, which was intended to be of a more general extent, and in which religion was in due season to be published to the world in its most perfect form.

This is a general view of the case : let us now examine it more distinctly.

And first, that at the time when the law of Moses and the Israelitish constitution were first established, idolatry and polytheism were generally spread through the nations, is a fact that can scarce be contested. This appears from all the remaining monuments of those times, as far as we can carry our inquiries. Nor could Lord Bolingbroke deny it. On the contrary he acknowledges, as shall be more particularly observed afterwards, that so great and general was the attachment of the people to idolatry and polytheism, that the most celebrated legislators of antiquity were everywhere obliged to fall in with it. And he himself asserts, that "polytheism and idolatry, have so close a connexion, with the ideas and affections of rude and ignorant men, that one of them could not fail to be their first religious principle, nor the other their first religious practice."* This may be thought to be carrying it too far; but it is certain, that if we judge from fact and experience, there would have been little hope or expectation of recovering mankind from the idolatry and corruption into which they were fallen, without some extraordinary

* Works, vol. iv. p. 21.

expedient, above what either the legislators or philosophers were able to effect.

If therefore it pleased God to interpose in an extraordinary manner for this purpose, it ought to be acknowledged to have been a signal instance both of his wisdom and of his goodness. Our author himself represents it as a fundamental article of the religion of nature, that "the Supreme Being is the true, and only true, object of our adoration."* He calls this *that first and great principle of natural theology*, and the *angular stone of true theism*. If ever therefore it was worthy of God to interpose at all, or to concern himself with the affairs of men, here was a proper occasion for it, for maintaining and preserving that fundamental principle of all religion, which was become so greatly corrupted and perverted among men, and overwhelmed under an amazing load of superstitions and idolatries.

This accordingly was the excellent design of the Mosaic constitution, and of all the extraordinary attestations whereby the divine authority of it was established. It is undeniably manifest, that the chief aim of that whole dispensation, and the principal point to which all its laws were directed, was to establish the worship and adoration of the one true God, the maker and preserver of all things, the supreme Lord and governor of the world, and of him alone; and to forbid and suppress, as far as its influence reached, that idolatry and superstition, which the wise men of other nations humoured and encouraged, and thought it impossible to subdue. If we compare the Mosaic institution with theirs, we shall find a vast difference between them. Lord Bolingbroke, speaking of the mighty degree of wealth and power to which the ancient priests, who were also the ancient philosophers and wise men, arrived in Egypt, Ethiopia, and the great eastern kingdoms, tells us, that "the general scheme of their policy seems to have been this. They built their whole system of philosophy on the superstitious opinions and practices that had prevailed in days of the greatest ignorance. They had other expedients which they employed artfully and successfully. Most of their doctrines were wrapped up in the sacred veil of allegory. Most of them were propagated in the mysterious cypher of sacred dialects, of sacerdotal letters, and of hieroglyphical characters; and the useful distinction of an outward and inward doctrine was invented, one for the vulgar, and one for the initiated."† He afterwards observes, that "the worship of one God, and the simplicity of natural religion, would not serve their turn. Gods were multiplied; that devotions, and all the profitable rites and ceremonies that belong them, might be so too. The invisible Mithras, without the visible, would have been of little value to the Magi."‡ It ought therefore to give us a very advantageous notion of the divinity of the law of Moses, and the truth of his pretensions, that the method he took was entirely different; and that he was far from making use of those arts and expedients, which the ancient

* Works, vol. v. p. 98.

† Ibid. vol. iv. p. 42, 43, 44.

‡ Ibid. p. 49.

priests and sages of the east thought necessary. He did not found his theology on false popular opinions ; on the contrary, the fundamental principle of his system was subversive of that polytheism, which his Lordship represents as the natural belief of men in the first uncultivated ages, and to which a great part of mankind in every age have been undeniably very prone. No variety or multiplicity of Gods was allowed in his constitution : no false or idolatrous devotions, in order to bring a greater revenue to the priests. He did not conceal his doctrines and laws in the cypher of sacred dialects, and sacerdotal letters, and hieroglyphical characters. His laws and doctrines were all designed for public universal use ; and there was no such thing in his system as secret doctrines, to be communicated only to a few, and concealed from the vulgar. On the contrary, it was a maxim that lay at the foundation of that constitution, that all the people were to be instructed in the knowledge and worship of the one true God, free from idolatry, and to be made acquainted with his laws, and the duties there required. And though our author speaks of the allegories in the Old Testament, as if *allegory passed for a literal relation of facts* among them, it is certain, that in the historical parts of the Bible, particularly in the Mosaic history, the facts are generally delivered in a plain, simple, narrative style, obvious to the capacities of the people.

His Lordship speaks with high approbation of the celebrated legislators of antiquity, whom he represents as *the first*, and he *supposes the best missionaries that have been seen in the world.** He instances in Mercury, Zoroaster, Zamolxis, Minos, Charondas, Numa ; and having told us, that they all, to give the greater sanction to their religious and civil institutions, pretended to communications with their gods, or to revelations from them, he declares, that "he believes it probable, that many of the reformers of mankind had discovered the existence of the one Supreme Being ; but this knowledge might seem to them not sufficiently adapted to the character of the people with whom they had to do." He adds, that "it was necessary in their opinion to suit their doctrine to the gross conceptions of the people, and to raise such affections and passions by human images, and by objects that made strong impressions on sense, as might be opposed with success to such as were raised by sensible images and objects too, and were destructive of order, and pernicious to society. They employed, for reforming the manners of the half-savage people they civilized, the dread of superior powers, maintained and cultivated by superstition, and applied by policy."† Thus Lord Bolingbroke, notwithstanding the zeal he professes for true theism, is pleased mightily to admire and applaud the ancient legislators, who, by his own account, countenanced and encouraged polytheism and idolatry ; whilst he abuses and vilifies Moses, the main design of whose law was to forbid and suppress it. Indeed, the method he took was such as showed that his law had an higher original than human policy. He established the wor-

* Works, vol. iv. p. 25.

† Ibid. p. 26, 27.

ship of the one true God, the Creator and Governor of the universe, and of him only, as the foundation and central point of his whole system. Nor did he, in order to *suit his doctrine to the gross conceptions of the people*, indulge them in that idolatry and polytheism to which the nations were so generally and strongly addicted. All worship of inferior deities was prohibited; and he expressly forbade the Hebrews to represent the pure essence of the Deity by any corporeal form, that he might accustom them to a more spiritual adoration of the Supreme Being; and if, as our author alleges, he adopted some of the Egyptian rites and customs in accommodation to the weakness and prejudices of the people,* though this is far from being so certain as he pretends,† we may be sure they were only such as might be innocently used, and not such as had a tendency to lead the people into idolatry, or out of which idolatry arose; for all things of this kind he strongly and most expressly prohibited; and therefore commanded the people *not to do after the doings of the land of Egypt*, or to *walk after their ordinances*, Lev. xviii. 3. The other legislators pretended, as well as he, to communications with the Divinity; yet whatever their private opinion might be, they durst not so much as attempt to take the people off from the superstition and idolatry they were so fond of. The reason was, they were sensible that their communication with the Deity was only pretended; and therefore they could not depend upon any extraordinary assistance to carry their designs into execution;

* Works, vol. iv. 31. 44.

† It appears, indeed, from the accounts of the Egyptian rites and customs given by some ancient writers, that there is a resemblance between some of those rites and customs, and those that were instituted in the Mosaic law; but there is no proof that the latter was derived from the former; nor, indeed, is there any proof which can be depended on, that those particular rites were in use among the Egyptians so early as the time of Moses, since the authors who mention them are of a much later date. And, notwithstanding all that hath been said of the improbability of the Egyptians borrowing them from the Israelites, yet the very high opinion the Egyptians of his time had conceived of Moses, as appeareth from Exod. xi. 3. and the great impressions which we may well suppose to have been made upon them by the extraordinary divine interpositions, in favour of the Israelites, at their departure out of Egypt, and during their abode in the wilderness, as well as at their entrance into the land of Canaan, of which the Egyptians could scarce be ignorant, might give occasion to their copying after some of the Mosaic institutions. They might possibly apprehend, that this would tend to draw down divine blessings upon them, or to avert judgments and calamities. These observances they might afterwards retain, though, in succeeding ages, when the first impressions were over, they were too proud to acknowledge from whence they had originally derived them. Besides, it should be considered, that of the several rites and customs common to the Israelites and Egyptians, might be derived to both from the patriarchal times. The famous M. le Clerc, notwithstanding the zeal he frequently expresseth for the hypothesis, that many of the Mosaic rites were instituted in imitation of the Egyptians, yet in his notes on Levit. xxiii. 10. speaking of the offering up of the first-fruits to God, observes, that this was neither derived from the Egyptians to the Hebrews, nor from the Hebrews to the Egyptians, but was derived to both from the earliest ages, and probably was originally of divine appointment. The same he thinks of the oblation of sacrifices; and adds, that there were perhaps many other things which both people derived from the same source. *Et alia forte multa ex æquo indidem traxit uterque populus.* So that many of those Jewish observances which some learned men, and M. le Clerc among the rest, have been fond of deriving from the Egyptians, had probably been in use in the times of the ancient patriarchs, and were retained, and farther confirmed, as well as other additional rites instituted, in the law of Moses.

but Moses not only pretended to have received his laws from God, but knew that it really was so, and was able to give the most convincing proofs of his divine mission. He was sure of a supernatural assistance, and this enabled him to accomplish what the ablest legislators of antiquity did not dare to attempt. His Lordship observes, that "the Israelites had the most singular establishment, ecclesiastical and civil, that ever was formed."^{*} And it must be acknowledged to have been in many respects very different from that which obtained in other nations. And it can hardly be conceived, how, as things were circumstanced, it could have been established among the Israelites, but in an extraordinary and miraculous way. The very nature of the constitution furnishes a strong presumption of the truth of the miraculous facts by which the authority of it was attested and confirmed, and rendereth the whole account consistent and credible.

The chief objection which is urged against this, is drawn from the absurdity of supposing, that God should select a people to himself, among whom he would erect a peculiar constitution for preserving his knowledge and worship, apart from the rest of mankind. Or, however, "if he had thought fit, that the sacred deposit should be trusted to a people chosen to preserve it till the coming of the Messiah, no people was less fit than the Israelites to be chosen for this great trust, on every account. They broke the trust continually. The revelations made to them were, as Mr. Locke observes, shut up in a little corner of the world, amongst a people, by that very law which they received with it, excluded from a commerce and communication with the rest of mankind. A people so little known, and contemned by those that knew them, were very unfit and unable to propagate the doctrine of one God in the world." He asks, "Wherefore then was this deposit made to them? It was of no use to other nations before the coming of Christ, nor served to prepare them for the reception of the gospel. And after his coming, it was in this great respect of little use, if of any, to the Jews themselves."[†]

There is scarce any thing that has been more the subject of ridicule, than the Jews being a chosen race, distinguished from all other nations of the earth. And yet that the Jews were remarkably distinguished above other nations, for the knowledge and worship of the one true God, is a matter of fact which cannot possibly be denied. Whosoever reads the monuments of heathen antiquity, of which there are very large remains extant, the constitution of their laws, and system of their policy, and the writings of their historians, poets, and philosophers, and compares them with the Jewish, will find an astonishing difference that cannot but strike every man who considers it. It must be acknowledged, that many of the heathen nations, particularly those of Greece and Rome, were renowned for learning and politeness, peculiarly eminent for their knowledge in the liberal arts and sciences, and for the fineness of their taste in

* Works, vol. v. p. 144.

† Ibid. p. 242, 243.

works of genius and literature, which has rendered them the admiration of all succeeding ages. But in matters of religion we meet every where with the most unquestionable proofs of the grossest idolatry and polytheism, in which not only were the vulgar universally involved, but it was countenanced and practised by the wisest and greatest men. That public worship which was instituted by their most celebrated legislators, and a conformity to which was recommended by the philosophers, was directed to a multiplicity of deities. On the other hand, if we turn our views to the Jews, a people no way eminent for their knowledge in the arts and sciences, we shall find that monotheism, the first and great principle, as he calls it, of natural theology, the acknowledgment and worship of the one true God, the Maker and Lord of the universe, and of him only, was the fundamental principle of their constitution and of their state; all worship of inferior deities, and of the true God by images, was most expressly prohibited in their laws.* If we examine their writings, we may observe, that they every where discover the profoundest veneration for the Deity; they abound with the sublimest sentiments of his divine Majesty, his incomparable perfections, his supreme dominion, and all-disposing providence, and every where express an utter detestation of all idolatry and polytheism. Nor is this the spirit of their moral and devotional writings only, but of their historical too; the principal design of which is to promote the great ends of religion, by representing the happy state of their nation, when they adhered to the worship of God, and persisted in obedience to his laws, and the calamities and miseries that befel them as a punishment for their defections and revolts. Their very poetry was vastly different from that of the heathen nations; not designed, like theirs, to celebrate the praises, the amours, the exploits of their

* Lord Bolingbroke takes notice, that Moses had made the destruction of idolatrous worship a principal object of his laws; and the zeal against images was great among the Jews. But he pretends that it was only carved or embossed images that were held in horror; but a flat figure, either painted or embroidered, was allowed; as, he thinks, is very clear from a passage which he has read, quoted from Maimonides. And he intimates, that "picture-worship came from the Jews to the Christians, as did that of carved images from the pagans." See vol. iv. p. 308. If that were the *casuistry*, as he calls it, of the Jews, it is certainly not chargeable on their law, which most expressly prohibited the worshipping, not only of *graven images*, but *the likeness* of any thing that is in heaven above, or in the earth beneath. But this is one instance, among many which might be produced, of the wrong use his Lordship has made of his too superficial reading. He was ready to take up with the slightest appearances in favour of any darling point he had in view. He has here confounded the making or drawing pictures or images with the worshipping them. Neither Maimonides, nor any other Jewish author, ever pretended that it was lawful for them to worship painted, any more than carved images. But as to the lawfulness of making images, or of painting and embroidering them, there were different opinions. Some carried it so far, that they were not for allowing any figures at all, either painted or carved, not so much as for ornament, for fear of giving occasion to idolatry. Others thought it lawful to have the figures of animals either painted or carved, except those of men, which were not allowed to be carved or embossed, though they might be painted, or drawn upon a plane; but neither the one nor the other were to be worshipped. If his Lordship had consulted Mr. Selden, whom he hath sometimes quoted, he would have found all this distinctly represented. *De jure nat. et gent. apud Hebr.* lib. xi. cap. 6, 7, 8, 9. There is no foundation, therefore, for his new discovery, that picture-worship came from the Jews to the Christians.

fictitious deities, but fitted to inspire the noblest ideas of God, and containing the most elevated descriptions of his glory and perfection.

It is natural therefore to enquire whence comes this amazing difference between the Jews and the most learned and civilized heathen nations in the knowledge and worship of the Deity. It is his Lordship's own observation, that "without revelation the belief of the unity of God could not be the faith of any one people, till observation and meditation, till a full and vigorous exercise of reason, made it such."* And again, he tells us, that "the rational, the orthodox belief was not established, nor could be so, till the manhood of philosophy."† How comes it then, that the public acknowledgment and adoration of the one true God, free from polytheism and idolatry, was the established religion of the Jews only? Were they the only people who had reason in a full and vigorous exercise, and among whom philosophy was arrived at its manhood? If so, it is wrong to represent them, as the deistical writers have frequently done, as the most stupid of the human race, a people *ignorant and barbarous*, as he and Mr. Hume calls them. Nor had he a right to laugh at Mr. Abbadie, who, he says, has represented them as a *nation of sages and philosophers*.‡ It will be readily allowed, that the Jews were not of themselves more wise and knowing, or better philosophers than other nations, or that they had made deeper observations and reflections; on the contrary, they were inferior to some in several branches of science. We have all the reason therefore in the world to conclude, that, if left to themselves, they would have been involved in the common polytheism and idolatry, as well as the nations round them; and that it was owing only to their having had the advantage of an extraordinary revelation, and to their peculiar constitution, which was of divine original, and which had been confirmed by the most illustrious attestations, that they became so remarkably distinguished.

Lord Bolingbroke was very sensible how unfavourable this is to his cause, and therefore finds great fault with Mr. Locke for assuming, that the belief and worship of the one true God was the national religion of the Israelites alone, and that it was their particular privilege and advantage to know the true God, and his true worship, whilst the heathen nations were in a state of darkness and ignorance. To take off the force of this seems to be the principal design of his third Essay, which is of *the rise and progress of monotheism*.§ But what he offers to this purpose is extremely trifling. He is forced quite to alter the true state of the question, and supposes Mr. Locke and the Christian divines to assert, that there was not any knowledge or worship of the true God in the world at all before the erection of the Israelitish polity; and that all the nations, except the Israelites, had been ignorant of the true God from the beginning. And then he argues, that "this implies that the Israelites were a nation from the beginning;" and gravely asks, "Were they

* Works, vol. iv. p. 20.

† Ibid. vol. iii. p. 283.

‡ Ibid. p. 22, 23.

§ Ibid. vol. iv. p. 187. et seq.

so, if we reckon from Adam, or even from Noah, or even from the vocation of their father Abraham?"* Thus he frames a ridiculous hypothesis for his adversaries, and then endeavours to expose it; whereas they maintain, what he thinks fit to deny, that the knowledge and worship of the true God was the original primitive religion of mankind, derived from the first parents and ancestors of the human race; but that before the time of Moses, the nations were generally lapsed into polytheism and idolatry, which appears from his own acknowledgment to have been the case.

He affirms indeed, "it is plain that the knowledge of the one true God would have been preserved in the world, if no such people as the Jews had ever been. And nothing can be more impertinent than the hypothesis, that this people, the least fit perhaps on many accounts that could have been chosen, was chosen to preserve this knowledge. It was acquired, and it was preserved independently of them, among the heathen philosophers. And it might have become, and probably did become, the national belief in countries unknown to us, or even in those who were fallen back into ignorance, before they appear in the traditions we have."† What an extraordinary way of talking is this! He argues from the supposed national belief of countries unknown to us, and of which he confesses we had no traditions extant, to show that religion would have been preserved in the world, if no such people as the Jews had ever been. As to the heathen philosophers, among whom, he says, the knowledge of the true God was preserved, it is certain, and he himself frequently owns it, that whatever knowledge some of them had this way, it was of little use to hinder the polytheism and idolatry of the people; and that, instead of reclaiming them from it, they fell in it with themselves, and even encouraged and advised the people to a compliance with the public laws and customs, by which polytheism was established.

Thus it appears, that after all the outcry and ridicule against the Jews as the unfittest people in the world to have the sacred deposit of the acknowledgment and adoration of the one true God committed to them, they were the only people concerning whom we have any proofs that they made a public national acknowledgment of this great principle, and among whom it was established as the fundamental law of their state.‡ It is urged indeed, that their constitu-

* Works, vol. iv. p. 233.

† Ibid. p. 79.

‡ His Lordship shows a strange unwillingness, that the Jews should have the honour of having had the knowledge and worship of the true God among them, in a degree far superior to other nations. Sometimes he insinuateth, as some others of the deistical writers have done, that the Israelites borrowed it from the Egyptians (though according to his own representation of the case, this was among the Egyptians part of their secret doctrine, not communicated to the vulgar), or from the Babylonians. And then the wonder will be how it came to pass, that the knowledge and worship of the one true God was preserved among the Jews, whilst the Egyptians and Babylonians were immersed in the most absurd and stupid idolatries. He thinks he might venture to affirm, that Abraham himself learned the orthodox faith, viz. relating to the knowledge and worship of the one true God, in Egypt and the neighbouring countries.* And he had said the same thing before.† There cannot be a greater proof of unreasonable prejudice than

* Works, vol. iv. p. 203.

† Ibid. vol. iii. p. 299.

tion had little effect upon them; that "their history is little else than a relation of their rebelling and repenting; and these rebellions, not those of particular men, surprised and hurried into disobedience by their passions, but national deliberate violations of the law, in defiance of the Supreme Being."* But if we compare the history of the Jews with that of the heathen nations, we shall find a very remarkable difference between them. Notwithstanding all the faults and defections of the former, and though they too often fell into idolatries and vicious practices, in a conformity to the customs of the neighbouring countries, they again recovered from them, and returned to the acknowledgment and adoration of the one true God, and him only, and often continued for a considerable number of years together in the profession and practice of the true religion, free from idolatry; of which there are many proofs in all the ages of their nation, from the days of Moses to the Babylonish captivity; during the time of their Judges, Kings, &c. as every one knows that is at all acquainted with their history. This was owing to the revelation they enjoyed; they still had recourse to their law, and by that reformed themselves, and returned to the pure worship of God according to that law; to which, after the Babylonish captivity, in which they had suffered so much for their defections and revolts, they adhered more closely than ever. But among the heathen nations, even those of them that were most learned and civilized, such as the Grecians and Romans, all was one continued course of polytheism, and the most absurd idolatries; nor can we name any period of their history, in which they laid aside the public polytheism, and returned to the acknowledgment and adoration of the one true God, and of him only. It must be said, therefore, that the Jewish history doth indeed furnish plain proofs of what the author observes, the proneness of mankind in all ages to polytheism and idolatry; but it shows at the same time, that, by virtue of their peculiar constitution, the worship of God was maintained among them in a manner in which it was not in any other nation; and this affordeth a signal proof of the benefit of revelation, and how far superior it is to the efforts of the wisest lawgivers and philosophers.

It appears then, that the Mosaic constitution did answer very valuable ends. By this there was a people preserved, among whom the knowledge and adoration of the one living and true God was maintained, in a world over-run with superstition and idolatry, and to whom an admirable system of laws was given. And notwithstanding all that is said about the people of Israel being shut up in a corner of the earth, they were placed in an advantageous situation, in the centre of the then known world, between Egypt and

this. It is surmised not only without evidence, but against it, since nothing can be plainer from the account given us of Abraham, than that he knew and worshipped the one true God before he came into Canaan at all, and therefore long before he went into Egypt. Nor did he learn it from the Chaldeans, among whom idolatry had then made a considerable progress, as appears from Josh. xxiv. 2. And agreeably to this is the universal tradition of the East; that he was the great restorer of the ancient true religion, which had been corrupted with idolatry.

* Works, vol. v. p. 136.

Arabia on the one hand, and Syria, Chaldea, and Assyria on the other, among whom the first great empires were erected, and from whence knowledge and learning seem to have been derived to the western parts of the world. And they were also in the neighbourhood of Sidon and Tyre, the greatest emporiums in the world, from whence ships went to all parts, even the most distant countries. Their peculiar constitution, whereby they were so remarkably distinguished from other nations, together with the extraordinary things God had done for them, had a natural tendency to put the neighbouring people upon enquiring into the design of all this, which would be apt to lead them to the adoration of the one true God, and into the knowledge of the true religion in its most necessary and important principles, and to discover to them the folly and unreasonableness of their own superstition and idolatry. That this was really part of the design which the divine wisdom had in view in this constitution, and that therefore it was intended to be of use to other nations besides the people of Israel, plainly appears from many passages of Scripture.* They were indeed kept distinct from other people, and it was necessary for wise ends they should be so; but they were always ready to receive among them those of other nations that worshipped the one true God, though they did not conform to the peculiar rites of their polity; and in the most flourishing times of their state, particularly in the reigns of David and Solomon, they had an extensive dominion and correspondence; and afterwards they had frequent intercourse with Egypt, Syria, Assyria, Chaldea, and Persia. And if we consider what is related concerning the Queen of Sheba, and Hiram, King of Tyre, as well as the memorable decrees of Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon, Darius the Mede, Cyrus, Darius Hystaspes, and Artaxerxes, Kings of Persia, the greatest monarchs then upon earth, and who published to the world the regard and veneration they had for the Lord Jehovah, the God whom the Jews worshipped; it is very probable that the fame of their laws, and the remarkable interpositions of providence on their behalf, spread far and wide among the nations, and contributed, in more instances than is commonly imagined, to keep up some knowledge of the true God, the Maker and Lord of the universe, and to give some check to the prevailing idolatry, and to preserve the ancient patriarchal religion from being utterly extinguished. To which it may be added, that, in the latter times of their state, vast numbers of the Jews were dispersed through Egypt, Babylonia, Persia, and other parts of the east; and afterwards through the Lesser Asia, and the several parts of the Roman empire: and they every-where turned many of the Gentiles from the common idolatry and polytheism; which the philosophers were scarce able to effect in a single instance. It appears then, that the setting apart that people in so extraordinary a manner, the revelation that was given them, and the marvellous acts of divine providence towards them,

* See particularly Exod. vii. 15. ix. 16. xiv. 4. Numb. xiv. 13, 14, 21. Deut. iv. 6. Kings viii. 41, 42, 43. Psal. xxvi. 3.

were fitted for having an extensive effect for the advantage of other nations as well as their own, and actually had that effect in multitudes of instances. By this constitution, there was a light set up, shining in a dark place, to which other nations might have recourse. And if, instead of making use of it as they ought to have done, they generally neglected it, and even hated and despised the Jews for having a religion so opposite to their own, and condemning their superstitions and idolatries; the fault is to be charged upon themselves, who neglected those means and helps, as they had done before the discoveries made to them by ancient tradition, and which had been originally derived from revelation, and by the light of nature, and the works of creation and providence. Besides this, what farther shows the great propriety and usefulness of this peculiar constitution, and the revelation given to the people of Israel, is, that it had a great tendency to prepare the world for receiving that more perfect dispensation which was to succeed it, and which was to be of a more general extent, and to be more universally diffused. The first harvest of converts to Christianity was among the Jews and their proselytes, of whom great numbers were brought over to the Christian faith. The Jewish Scriptures were generally dispersed, and had spread the knowledge of God, and had raised an expectation of a glorious and divine person, by whom a new and most excellent dispensation was to be introduced, and the Gentiles were to be brought over, more generally than had hitherto been done, from their superstitions and idolatries, from their abominable vices and corruptions, to the pure worship of God, and the knowledge and practice of true religion. This glorious person was foretold and described in the Jewish prophecies by many remarkable characters, which being accomplished in our Saviour gave a most illustrious attestation to his divine mission. And these prophecies were kept more clear and distinct, by being in the hands of a peculiar people as the depositaries of them: whereas if they had been, like other traditions, left merely at large among the nations, they would probably in process of time have been corrupted and lost, and the testimony arising from them must have fallen.

Taking all these considerations together, it appears, that the peculiar Jewish economy answered many valuable and important ends: and that therefore it was no way unworthy of the divine wisdom to interpose in an extraordinary manner to give a divine attestation to it. And that the miraculous facts, if really done, were every way sufficient for this purpose, our author himself does not deny. On the contrary, he looks upon them to have been so strong and convincing, that it would have been impossible to resist them; and he thinks they must have been sufficient, if they had been really done, to have brought over all mankind to the belief and acknowledgment of the one true God, not only in that age, but in all succeeding ages. His manner of expressing himself is remarkable. He says, that "the reviving and continuing the primitive faith and worship by such a series of revelations and miracles among one people, would have made any revival of them unnecessary

among any other; because they would have been more than sufficient to continue them uncorrupted over the whole world; not only till the vocation of Abraham, four hundred years after the deluge; not only till the coming of the Messiah, two thousand years after that, but even to this hour, and to the consummation of all things." * Not to insist upon the great absurdity of his supposing, that the miracles wrought among the Israelites so long after the vocation of Abraham, would have been sufficient to have kept the true religion uncorrupted till the vocation of Abraham, a blunder which could only have been owing to the most inexcusable negligence in writing; I think it follows from his own concessions, that the miracles and other extraordinary methods made use of for the establishment of the Mosaic economy, were of such a nature as to be well fitted to the end for which they were designed, the revival and establishment of the worship of the one true God, in opposition to idolatry and polytheism. And though it be wrong to suppose, as he most absurdly does, that they must have established it among all mankind, and have prevented all deviations from it in all ages and nations; yet it will be acknowledged, that those facts were of such a kind as to have been sufficient to convince all those to whom they were known, that the laws, in attestation to which they were wrought, were of a divine original. Accordingly the people of Israel, notwithstanding their proneness to idolatry, and their obstinate prejudices, were brought to submit to those laws, as of divine authority, and to receive them as the rule of their polity. And though they fell off on several occasions to a compliance with the idolatries of the neighbouring nations, which they mixed with their own rites, yet the remembrance and belief of those facts, which always continued among them, had mighty effects, in every age of their state, to bring them back to the true worship of God, and to an obedience to their laws. And they have had a great effect ever since, wherever they have been believed, to fill men with a holy fear of God, and with the most adoring thoughts of his divine unequalled majesty and glory. This effect they continue to have among Christians, and are like to have to the end of the world.

It is no just objection against the truth of the facts, that they come to us through the hands of the Jews: for what other testimony can be reasonably desired, or can the nature of the thing admit of, than the concurrent testimony of that people, to whom the laws were given, and among whom the facts were done? A testimony continued throughout all the ages of their nation, and appearing in all their records and monuments. The facts were done among themselves, and therefore in the nature of things could only be witnessed by themselves. If those of any other nation had recorded them, they must have had their accounts from the people of Israel: and if they had declared their belief of those facts, and of the divine authority of those laws, there would have been an equal pretence for rejecting their testimony, as for rejecting that of

* Works, vol. iv. p. 214.

the Jews. But it is in truth very absurd to make it an objection, that the accounts of these facts are transmitted to us by those who were the only proper persons to give an account of those facts, and by whom alone those accounts could have been originally given, if they had been true. If it be pretended, that the facts were feigned by them to do honour to their nation, it must be considered, that, as was before hinted, they are so circumstanced, and mixed with such disadvantageous accounts of the temper and conduct of that people, as no man would have feigned who had their honour in view, or who had not a greater regard to the truth of the facts, than to the humouring and flattering that people. For it is plain, that the facts might have been so contrived, if they had been fictitious, as to have saved the honour of their nation, and not to have given occasion to the severe censures and reproaches which have been cast upon them in all ages on that account. And what farther derives great credit to the relations of those extraordinary and miraculous facts, is, that the books in which they are contained not only appear to have been written with an unaffected simplicity, and a sincere impartial regard to truth, mixed with a profound veneration for the Deity, but they contain the most remarkable predictions of future events, which it was impossible for any human sagacity to foresee; particularly relating to the future fates of that nation; the surprising revolutions they should undergo; the calamities, captivities, and desolations, that should befall them; their being scattered and dispersed all over the face of the earth, and every where exposed to hatred, contempt, and reproach, and yet still wonderfully preserved as a distinct people, as we see they are at this day; notwithstanding they have for so many ages lost their genealogies, and been deprived of their most valued privileges, and rendered incapable of exercising their most solemn sacred rites as prescribed in their law, and without any prophets raised up among them, and acknowledged by themselves as such, to support their hopes. These are things for which no parallel can be found in any other nation upon earth. So that the present state of that people, in all respects so extraordinary, is a living proof of the truth and divinity of those writings which contain an account of the laws that were originally given them, and of the wonderful facts by which those laws were enforced and established. This is a proof still stronger to us, than it could have been in the ages soon after those books were written, and affordeth one instance in which the evidence of those facts, instead of being diminished by time, has acquired new strength and force.

You will forgive the length of this letter, as I was willing to lay together in one view all that I thought necessary for clearing and establishing the truth of the Mosaic history against our author's objections, and which, if it be well supported, the divinity of those laws, and of that constitution, follows with invincible evidence.

LETTER XXIX.

The excellent Nature and Tendency of the Mosaic Writings and the Scriptures of the Old Testament.—Lord Bolingbroke treats it as Blasphemy to say that they are divinely inspired.—A Summary of his Objections against their divine Original and Authority.—His Charge against the Scriptures, as giving mean and unworthy Ideas of God, considered at large.—The Representations he himself gives of God, and of his Providence, shown to be unworthy, and of the worst Consequence.—Concerning God's being represented in Scripture as entering into Covenant with Man.—The Pretence of his being described as a tutelary God to Abraham, and to the People of Israel, and of his being degraded to the meanest Offices and Employments, distinctly examined.—The Passages in which bodily Parts seem to be ascribed to God, not designed to be taken in a literal Sense.—The Scripture itself sufficiently guards against a wrong Interpretation of those Passages.—In what Sense human Passions and Affections are attributed to the Supreme Being.—A remarkable Passage of Mr. Collins to this Purpose.

SIR,

THE design of my last letter was to vindicate the truth and credit of the Mosaic history, and of the extraordinary facts there related. And if that history be admitted as true, the divine original and authority of the Mosaic constitution is established. But besides the external proofs arising from the extraordinary and miraculous facts, whosever with an unprejudiced mind looks into the revelation itself as contained in the sacred writings of the Old Testament, may observe remarkable internal characters, which demonstrate its excellent nature and tendency. At present I shall observe, that we are there taught to form the worthiest notions of God, of his incomparable perfections, and of his governing providence, as extending over all his works, particularly towards mankind. We are at the same time instructed in the true state of our own case, as we are weak, dependent, guilty creatures, and are directed to place our whole hope and trust in God alone, and to refer all to him, as our chiefest good, and highest end; to be thankful to him for all the good things we enjoy, and to be patient and resigned to his will under all the afflictive events that befall us. Our moral duty is there set before us in its just extent. The particulars of it are laid down in plain and express precepts, enforced upon us in the name and by the authority of God himself, whose love of righteousness, goodness, and purity, and just detestation of vice and wickedness, are represented in the strongest manner. Those sacred writings every-where abound with the most encouraging declarations of his grace and mercy towards the truly penitent, and with the most awful denunciations of his just displeasure against obstinate presumptuous transgressors. And the important lesson which runs through the whole is this, that we are to make the pleasing and serving God the chief business of our lives, and that our happiness consisteth in his favour, which is only to be obtained in the uniform practice of piety and virtue.

Such evidently is the nature and tendency of the sacred writings of the Old Testament. But very different is the representation made of them by Lord Bolingbroke. Not content with endeavouring to destroy the credit of the history, he hath, by arguments drawn from the nature of the revelation itself contained in the Jewish Scriptures, used his utmost efforts to show, that it is absolutely unworthy of God; that "there are marks of an human original in those books, which point out plainly the fraud and the imposture:"* and that "it is no less than blasphemy to assert them to be divinely inspired."†

The objections he has advanced against the Scriptures of the Old Testament, and especially against the Mosaic writings, are principally these that follow:

1. That they give the most unworthy ideas of the Supreme Being: they degrade him to the meanest offices and employments, and attribute to him human passions, and even the worst of human imperfections.

2. Some of the laws there given are absolutely contrary to the law of nature, which is the law of God, and therefore cannot be of divine original. He instanceth particularly in the command for extirpating the Canaanites, and for punishing idolaters with death.

3. The first principle of the law of Moses is insociability; and it took the Jews out of all moral obligations to the rest of mankind.

4. There are several passages in the Mosaic writings, which are false, absurd, and unphilosophical; as particularly the account there given of the creation of the world, and the fall of man.

5. The sanctions of the law of Moses were wholly of a temporal nature, and were contrived and fitted to humour and gratify the appetites and passions; without any regard to a future state of rewards and punishments.

These are the principal objections urged by Lord Bolingbroke against the divine authority of the Scriptures of the Old Testament, and particularly of the books of Moses. There are some other smaller exceptions, which I shall take notice of as they come in my way.

1. The first class of objections relateth to the mean and unworthy representations that are made to us in Scripture of the Supreme Being. It hath always been accounted one of the distinguishing excellencies of the sacred writings, that they abound with the most just and sublime descriptions of the Deity, which have a manifest tendency to raise our minds to the most worthy and exalted conceptions of his divine majesty, and his incomparable excellencies and perfections. Our author himself thinks fit to acknowledge, that "there are many passages in Scripture, which give most sublime ideas of the majesty of the Supreme Being:" And that "the conceptions which the Jews entertained of the Supreme Being were very orthodox in the eye of reason; and their psalmists, and their

* Works, vol. iii. p. 288.

† Ibid. p. 299.

prophets, strained their imaginations to express the most elevated sentiments of God, and of his works, and of the methods of his providence."* If therefore there be any passages which, literally taken, seem to be unworthy of God, they ought, by all the rules of candour and fair criticism to be interpreted in a consistency with these; since it cannot be reasonably supposed, that those who entertained such noble and sublime sentiments of the Divinity, should at the same time, as he would persuade us they did, form the meanest and unworthiest conceptions of him.

But let us consider the particulars of his charge: and it amounts in effect to this: That the scriptures degrade the Supreme Being, by representing him as descending to the meanest offices and employments: and that they attribute to him human passions, and even the worst of human imperfections.

As to the first part of the charge, the degrading the Divine Majesty to the meanest, the unworthiest, offices and employments, he observes, that, according to the Mosaic account, "the Supreme Being condescended to be the tutelary God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and under this character he acted a part which a sensible heathen, not transported by presumptuous notions of his own importance, nor by the impudence of enthusiasm, would have thought too mean and too low for any of his inferior gods or demons."† This objection he frequently repeats in various forms. He introduces one of the heathen sages as alleging, that among the Mosaic superstitions there was one, which could be charged neither on the Egyptians, nor any other heathen nation, and which surpassed the most extravagant of theirs; and this was, that the Supreme Being is represented as having taken upon him a name, which was a very magnificent one indeed, and such as might denote the Supreme Being, but still a name by which he might be distinguished as the tutelary God of one family first, and then of one nation particularly, and almost exclusively of all others."‡ But there is no passage where he pushes this objection more strongly, than in p. 463 of vol. iv. where he observes, that "the eternal and infinite Being is represented in the Jewish histories, and in the whole system of their religion, as a local tutelar deity, carried about in a trunk, or residing in a temple; as an ally, who had entered into covenant with their fathers; as a king, who had actually held the reins of their government; and as an industrious magistrate, who descended into all the particulars of religious and civil administration, even into the most minute and meanest. Thus were the Jews accustomed to familiarize themselves with the Supreme Being, and to imagine that he familiarized with them, and to figure him to themselves receiving their sacrifices, and listening to their prayers, sometimes at least, as grossly as Lucian represents Jupiter." He seems to think the heathens were in the right, when they blamed the Jews for "bringing the first and only God too near to man, and making him an actor

* Works, vol. iii. p. 99. vol. iv. p. 463.

† Ibid. vol. iii. p. 304.

‡ Ibid. vol. iv. p. 34.

immediately, and personally as it were, in the creation and government of the world."* And he had before observed, that, according to the scripture, "the correspondence between God and man was often immediate, and even intimate and familiar with his elect, and with such purified souls as were prepared for it. And that the whole tenor of the sacred writings represented the Supreme Being in frequent conferences with his creatures: God covenanting and making bargains with man, and man with God: God holding the language of man, reasoning, arguing, expostulating, in a very human manner, animated by human affections, and appealing to human knowledge."†

Before I enter on a particular discussion of what his Lordship hath here offered, it is proper to observe, that though, in a passage just now cited, the Jews seemed to be blamed for bringing the Supreme Being *too near to man*, and supposing him to be *an actor immediately, and as it were personally, in the government of the world*; yet he elsewhere finds fault with the heathen philosophers for excluding the Monad, or supreme unity, from the creation and government of the world, and *banishing him almost entirely from the system of his works*, whereby he *became in some sort a nonentity, an abstract or notional being*.‡ And he censures them for "imaging a divine monarchy, on a human plan, the administration of which was not carried on by the immediate agency of God himself, but mediately, as in terrestrial monarchies, by that of inferior agents, according to the ranks and provinces allotted them."§ And to this notion he thinks a considerable "part of the heathen idolatry is to be ascribed." It is hard to know what idea this writer would have us form of the divine government. On the one hand, he seems to think it a demeaning the majesty of the Supreme Being to suppose him to *act immediately, and personally, as it were*, in the government of the world; and on the other hand, he will not allow, that the divine administration is carried on *mediately* by the ministry of inferior agents. And if God does not govern the world, either by his own personal immediate agency, or by that of subordinate agents and instruments, it cannot easily be conceived in what sense he can be said to govern the world at all.

Indeed any one that impartially considers the several passages above mentioned, relating to the Jewish scriptures, and many others of the like kind, which occur in Lord Bolingbroke's writings, and compares them with the scheme which he himself hath advanced, and of which an account was given in the eighth letter, will be apt to think that the real original ground of his prejudices against the sacred writings is this: That they every where represent God as interesting himself in the affairs of men: whereas he looks upon it to be unworthy of the divine majesty to suppose that he now concerneth himself about them, or exerciseth any care with respect to the individuals of the human race. And since he asserts, that "the

* Works, vol. iv. p. 463.

† Ibid. p. 155.
§ Ibid. p. 73.

‡ Ibid. p. 465.

most elevated of finite intelligent beings are not a jot nearer to the Supreme Intelligence than the lowest,"* he must, upon his scheme, think it as unbecoming the majesty of God to exercise any special care towards the highest of angelical beings, or whatever inhabitants there may be in any part of this vast universe, as towards the individuals of mankind. This scheme is not only, as was shown before, of a most pernicious tendency, and manifestly subversive of all religion and the fear of God, but at the bottom argueth, notwithstanding all its glorious pretences, very dishonourable and unworthy conceptions of the Supreme Being. For either it supposeth him not to be present to the creatures he hath made, which is to deny the immensity of his essence, or that, if he be present, he hath not a certain knowledge of them, and of their actions and affairs, and consequently is not omniscient; though our author himself says, "It may be demonstrated, that the All-perfect Being must be omniscient, as well as self-existent."† Or that if he hath a perfect knowledge of the actions and affairs of his reasonable creatures, yet he is absolutely indifferent about them, whether they obey his laws or not; whether good or evil, virtue or vice, happiness or misery, prevail in the moral world. This must be owned to be very well suited to the character of an Epicurean deity, whose happiness consisteth in an eternal indolence, and who is supposed to be of a nice and delicate constitution, unable to bear the noise, the clamours, and confusion, of this lower world, but is no way consistent with the idea of the infinitely-perfect Being. How much nobler is the idea that is given us of the Deity in the holy scriptures! where he is represented as filling heaven and earth with his presence, and exercising a constant inspection over all his creatures, and all their actions, as disposing and ordering all events, without distraction or confusion, in such a manner, as in the final issue of things to provide for the happiness of those that sincerely obey him, and go on in the practice of righteousness and virtue, and to manifest a just displeasure against those who obstinately persist in an impertinent course of vice and wickedness; and in a word, as governing the world, and all the orders of beings in it, with infinite wisdom, righteousness, and equity, and with the same almighty facility with which he created them! Such an idea of God is not only of the greatest consequence to the interests of religion and virtue in the world, but is infinitely more august and noble in itself, and more conformable to the highest notions we can form of infinite perfection, than that which this writer would substitute in its stead.

I shall not add any thing here to what was offered in my eighth Letter, concerning a particular providence, as extending even to the individuals of the human race. If providence doth not interpose in human affairs at all, it cannot be expected that God should at any time communicate extraordinary discoveries and revelations of his will to mankind. But if, as hath been shown, providence doth concern itself even for individuals, and for promoting human happi-

* Works, vol. iv. p. 183.

† Ibid. vol. v. p. 36.

ness, in a way consistent with moral agency, it is very reasonable to suppose, that it may please God to make discoveries and revelations of his will, for promoting the knowledge and practice of religion and virtue in the world, and that he may communicate such discoveries to particular persons, or to larger communities, in such a way as may best answer the intentions of his wise and holy providence, of which he must be allowed to be the properest judge. And if he seeth fit to make such revelations of his will, they must be communicated in such a manner as is accommodated to human understandings, and fitted to work upon human affections: and therefore, if they be addressed to men in a way of *reasoning, arguing, and expostulation*, it would be absurd to make this an objection, as this writer seems to do, since there is nothing in this, but what is wisely suited to the end we may suppose the Supreme Wisdom and Goodness to have had in view in giving such revelations.

He represents it as altogether unworthy of the Supreme Being to suppose him to enter into covenant with man; and in order to expose this, he is pleased to represent it under the mean idea of God's *making bargains with man, or man with God*. But if we consider what is really intended by it, we shall find, that a covenant in this case is properly to be understood of a conditional promise, whereby blessings and benefits are promised on God's part, and duties required on ours: it is a law of God enjoining obedience, with a promise or promises annexed to it, by which God condescendeth to oblige himself to confer certain benefits upon his creatures, the subjects of his moral government, if they fulfil and obey the injunctions he hath laid upon them, and comply with the terms which he hath appointed. And considered in this view, it is so far from being a just objection against the sacred writings, that it may be regarded as their great excellence, and what should mightily recommend them to our esteem, that God is there represented as dealing with man in a way of covenant; that is, in a way admirably suited to us as we are reasonable creatures, moral agents. By this God doth not divest himself of his character and authority as our supreme universal Lord. He hath an undoubted right to give laws to his creatures, and lay what commands or injunctions upon them he seeth fit, in a way of absolute sovereignty, without bringing himself under any promises and engagements; but he condescendeth, in his marvellous wisdom and goodness, to encourage and animate our obedience by express promises and assurances of his grace and favour; and we on our parts bring ourselves under the most solemn engagements, which bind us more strictly to our duty, by our own express consent; than which no way of dealing with us can have a greater tendency to promote our comfort, and the interests of religion and virtue in the world.

As to the particular covenant made with Abraham, and God's engaging, as he loves to express it, to be a *tutelary God* to him; this put into other words signifies no more than this, that it pleased God to grant to this excellent person express promises of his special grace and favour, upon condition of his faith and obedience; and

particularly, that he promised to give the land of Canaan to his descendants; and that from him should proceed that glorious person, who had been promised from the beginning, and who was actually to come into the world in the fulness of time, and in whom all the families of the earth were to be blessed. This covenant made with Abraham was not only proper, as it was a distinguishing mark of the divine favour and goodness to a person, who was an eminent example of piety and virtue, and the fame of whose excellent qualities is spread all over the east, even to this day, but as it made a part of a glorious scheme which the divine wisdom had in view, and which was to be accomplished in the fittest season, and to be of extensive benefit to mankind. So that this particular covenant was really intended in a subserviency to the general good.

With regard to the covenant made with the people of Israel at Horeb, the design of it was to erect a sacred polity, the fundamental article of which was the acknowledgment and adoration of the one true God, the Maker and Governor of the world, free from all idolatry and polytheism. This transaction was carried on with a majesty and solemnity becoming the great Lord of the universe, and which tended to inspire the profoundest veneration for him, and for the laws he was pleased to promulgate. And at the same time it was wisely ordered, that the people should bind themselves by their own express consent, and solemn stipulation, to receive that constitution, and obey those laws. The moral laws given to that people were excellent: the judicial laws just and equitable: the ceremonial laws were instituted for wise reasons, some of which we are able to assign at this distance; and there is no doubt to be made, that if we were well acquainted with the circumstances of that time and people, we should be convinced of the great propriety of many of those ceremonious injunctions, which now we are not able particularly to account for. Our author talks of the priest's *wearing a ridiculous cap and breast-plate, fringes, and bells*, and thinks it absurd to suppose, that *such trifles as these were the institutions of divine wisdom*.^{*} But it was wisely ordered under that constitution, that nothing relating to divine worship should be left to their own invention. It was judged proper to give them rules descending even to minute particulars, and to confine them to those rules, the more effectually to hinder them from deviating into endless superstitions. The particulars referred to, contributed to promote order and decency in the externals of religious service; nor was there any thing in the Jewish instituted rites absurd, indecent, ridiculous, or impure, as were many of the rites in use among the pagan nations.

As to God's being a tutelary Deity to the people of Israel, this, if stripped of the form of expression which he has chosen in order to ridicule it, only signifies, that God was pleased to make special revelations and discoveries of his will to that people, and to give them holy and excellent laws, at the same time promising, if they obeyed

^{*} Works, vol. v. p. 96.

those laws, to grant them his special protection, to honour them with great privileges and advantages, and to make them happy in the effects of his grace and favour; and threatening, if they proved obstinate and disobedient, to inflict upon them awful punishments, the tokens of his righteous displeasure. And that there is any thing in this unbecoming the wise and righteous Lord and Governor of the world, supposing him to concern himself in human affairs, this writer has not proved, except confident assertions must pass for proofs. And as to his being the King of Israel, this is not to be understood as if he did not still continue to be the universal Sovereign and Lord of all mankind. He was never regarded as having divested himself of that character. No where is his universal dominion and governing providence, as extending to all his creatures, and especially to the whole human race, more strongly asserted, or more nobly described, than in the Jewish Scriptures. But it pleased him, for wise purposes, to erect a peculiar constitution among the people of Israel, according to which he condescended to be, in a special sense, their King and Sovereign. And what we are to understand by it is properly this: that he gave them laws at the first establishment of their polity, which were to be the rule of their state, and by which they were to be governed; and upon their observance of which the preservation of their national privileges depended; and that he raised up judges and governors, who were to rule them in his name, and as by his authority, and to be the leaders and generals of their armies, for delivering them from their enemies and oppressors; and he was pleased also to give them direction in matters of great and public moment, by the oracle of Urim and Thummim, which was by his appointment established among them for that purpose. There was nothing in all this but what was wisely suited to the nature and design of that particular constitution, and tended to confirm and establish that people in the belief and adoration of the one true God, and to exhibit a glorious sensible proof of his governing providence among them. But the theocracy was never designed to supersede the office and authority of the ordinary magistrates, as this writer seems to insinuate, by telling us, that under that constitution God "acted as an industrious magistrate, who descended into all the particulars of religious and civil administration, even into the most minute and meanest." For though the laws were originally given by God, the execution of those laws was ordinarily vested in the magistrates appointed for that purpose, and chosen by the people in their several tribes. So they were in the days of Moses, and under the judges, when the people were more properly and immediately under the administration of the theocracy.

But it is farther urged, that God is represented in the Jewish Scriptures as a *local Deity, residing and dwelling in a temple, or carried about by the Levites in a wooden chest or trunk*. The author seems fond of this observation, for he has it over three or four times on different occasions. But by this reflection he has exposed himself rather than the Jews. That people, instructed by their Scrip-

tures, had nobler notions of the Deity than to be capable of imagining, that the Lord of the universe, who, they were taught to believe, made and governeth the world, and filleth heaven and earth, was shut up and confined in a wooden chest. It is true, that the more effectually to preserve that people from idolatry, and to impress and affect their minds with a lively sense of God's special presence among them, there was one sacred place appointed, the tabernacle first, and the temple afterwards, which was peculiarly dedicated to his solemn worship and service. There their most solemn acts of devotion were to be performed; and there was the ark or sacred chest he speaks of, in which were deposited the tables of the original covenant between God and them; there also was a cloud of glory, the majestic symbol of God's immediate presence. It cannot be reasonably denied, that God may, if he thinks fit, give illustrious exhibitions of his divine presence and majesty by a visible external glory and splendour, in certain places, or on certain occasions. But it doth not follow, that he is therefore a limited Being, or that his essence is circumscribed, or confined to that particular place, where it pleaseth him thus peculiarly to manifest his special presence. How far the Israelites were from forming such mean notions of the Divinity as this writer is pleased to insinuate, we have an authentic proof in the admirable prayer offered up by Solomon at the dedication of the temple, in the name and presence of all the people; in which he addresseth himself to God in that noble manner: *But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, the heaven and heaven of heavens cannot contain thee! how much less this house which I have builded!* 1 Kings viii. 27. See also Isa. lxvi. 1.

It has often given me great pleasure to reflect upon what every one that impartially considers the scriptures of the Old Testament must be sensible of, that the Jews, if they governed themselves by their sacred writings, were instructed, in their ideas of God, to unite the most incomprehensible greatness and majesty, and the most marvellous grace and condescension: to regard him as filling heaven and earth with the immensity of his presence, and yet as vouchsafing to grant visible tokens and symbols of his special presence among them by his ark and temple: as humbling himself even in beholding the things that are done in heaven, and yet as regarding the things that are done in the earth. They acknowledged the glorious hosts of angels as the attendants of the divine majesty, the blessed ministers of his power and wisdom: but still as infinitely inferior, and even *chargeable with folly* before him: and instead of erecting them into deities, and adoring them as the heathens did, they called upon them to join with them in worshipping and adoring the supreme universal Lord. They were ready to cry out, with a devout admiration in the contemplation of God's unequalled dignity and glory, *Who in the heavens can be compared unto the Lord? What is man, that thou art mindful of him?* But they did not under this pretence represent him as taking no notice of men, or their concerns. They considered him as infinitely raised above the highest of his creatures, yet not neglecting or despising

the meanest: That *his name is exalted above all blessing and praise*, and yet he hath a gracious regard to our prayers and praises, if offered up from sincere and upright hearts. Thus they were taught in Scripture to celebrate and adore his matchless grace and condescending goodness, without impairing the splendour and glory of his infinite majesty. And accordingly, in the patterns of devotion that are set before us in Scripture, we may observe the most adoring thoughts, the most sublime conceptions, of God's unsearchable greatness, and supreme dominion, and spotless purity; and the most humbling sense of human weakness, guilt and unworthiness, mixed with an ingenuous confidence in his infinite grace and sovereign mercy.

Thus I have considered pretty largely that part of the objection, which chargeth the Scriptures with degrading the Deity to mean and unworthy offices and employments, and shall now take some notice of the other part of the charge, viz. that the Scriptures ascribe to him bodily parts, and human passions and affections, and even those of the worst kind.

With respect to the former, he observeth, that the Jewish Scriptures ascribe to God "not only corporeal appearances, but corporeal action, and all the instruments of it, eyes, ears, mouth, hands, and feet.—And that they are apt in many places to make those who read them represent the Supreme Being to themselves like an old man looking out of the clouds."* He says, "the literal signification of such expressions is abominable." And he ridicules those who throw what he calls a *flimsy allegorical veil* over them, as having *stolen it from the wardrobe of Epicurus*. But the ridicule lights upon himself, who I believe was the first man that would have thought of having recourse to Epicurus to interpret the sense of Moses. There needs no more than common attention, and a comparing the Scripture with itself, to be convinced that it is incapable of the absurd representation he would put upon those passages. He observes indeed, that "images taken from corporeal substance, from corporeal action, and from the instruments of it, cannot give us notions in any degree proper, of God's manner of being, nor of that divine inconceivable energy in which the action of God consists." Nor are those expressions of hands, feet, eyes, and ears, when ascribed to God in scripture, designed to signify either the manner of his being, or of his divine energy, concerning which there are many noble expressions in the sacred writings, which have an admirable sublimity in them; but by an easy metaphor, understood by all the world, hands signify power, eyes and ears signify knowledge. And whereas he adds, that "they cannot exalt, they must debase our conceptions, and accustom the mind insensibly to confound divine with human ideas and notions, God with man;" the answer is obvious: That sufficient care is taken in the holy scriptures to prevent this, by furnishing us with the most sublime ideas of the Divinity that can possibly enter into the human mind. God's incomprehensible majesty,

* Works, vol. v. p. 520.

his immense greatness, his almighty power, the infiniteness of his understanding, his omnipresence, are frequently represented and described in so admirable a manner, as shows, with the last degree of evidence, that the expressions which seem to ascribe bodily parts and members to him cannot be understood in a gross literal sense. Our author himself, ascribing motives to God, observes, that "we must speak of God after the manner of men."* And indeed we must either not speak of God at all, or we must speak of him in ways of expression, originally derived from something relating to our own bodies or minds. This writer elsewhere insinuates, that we resemble God no more in our souls than we do in our bodies; and that to say his intellect is like ours, is as bad as the anthropomorphites.† So that, according to him, expressions drawn from the faculties of the soul, are as improper as those drawn from the members of the body. Thus, under pretence of a profound veneration for the Deity, we must not speak of God at all, as some of the ancient philosophers thought it unlawful to name him, or to worship him, except in silence. Yea, we must not so much as think of him; for our ideas of God fall, no doubt, infinitely short of his real majesty and glory, as well as our expressions. But it may be observed, that this forward censorer falls into that way of talking himself which he finds fault with in the holy scriptures. He represents God as *speaking to men* by the law of nature; he calls it the *voice of God*, and the *word of God*. He speaks of the *hands of God*,‡ and of his *seeing* all things. And though he represents the ascribing ideas to God as no less improper, and even profane, than the ascribing hands and feet to him, yet on several occasions he talks of the *divine ideas*.

But he farther urges, that the scriptures attribute to God human affections and passions, and even those of the worst kind; that "they impute such things to the Divinity as would be a disgrace to humanity:"§ That "the Jewish system contained such instances of partiality in love and hatred, of furious anger, and unrelenting vengeance, in a long series of arbitrary judgments, as no people on earth but this would have ascribed, I do not say to God, but to the worst of those monsters, who are suffered or sent by God, for a short time, to punish the iniquities of men."|| To the same purpose he afterwards observes, that according to the representations made in scripture, God "loves with partiality, his mercy is arbitrary, and depends on mere will—And towards mankind his anger is often furious, his hatred inveterate, his vengeance unrelenting; but when the wicked repent of their sins, he repents sometimes of his severity." And then he asks, "What a description is this of the All-perfect Being?" But this description is his own, and is founded on a gross misrepresentation of the true intention and design of the sacred writings. As to loving with partiality, if by that be meant his favouring and distinguishing some with greater privileges and advantages, and giving them more valuable means of improvement than others;

* Works, vol. v. p. 466. † Ibid. v. p. 35. ‡ Ibid. vol. iv. p. 395.
§ Ibid. vol. iii. p. 299. || Ibid. vol. v. p. 515.

nothing can be more evident, than that this has been often and still is done in the course of his providence. Nor is this any more to be found fault with, than his making different species of beings, some vastly transcending others in their faculties, and capacities for happiness. He is the absolute Lord and dispenser of his own gifts, and his goodness is that of a free and sovereign Benefactor; and it would be the height of absurdity and profaneness to pretend to tie him down to give to all men precisely the same capacities, the same advantages and opportunities, and to limit him so, that he shall not dispense his gifts in such measures and proportions as he thinks fit, nor shall have it in his power to do any thing for any one person or people, but what he does precisely for every person and for all people. But if by *partiality* be meant partiality in judgment, and in the distribution of rewards and punishments, it is very unjust to charge the holy scriptures as attributing such partiality to the Supreme Being. There is nothing more strongly and expressly asserted there, than that God *accepteth not the persons of men*, and that he *judgeth without respect of persons*. It is evident, not merely from a single passage, but from the whole tenor of the sacred writings, that the righteous Lord loveth righteousness; that he extendeth his favour to all those of the human race, of whatever family or nation, who sincerely love and obey him, and go on in a course of real piety and virtue; that such persons alone can hope for an interest in his favour, and to obtain the divine acceptance and approbation; and that all wicked and presumptuous sinners, of whatever nation or profession, shall be exposed to his just displeasure. Nor are there any such things ascribed to God in scripture as *arbitrary judgments*. And whereas this author charges it as unworthy of God to represent him as *repenting of his severity* when the wicked repent of their sins; the thing really intended by this must be acknowledged to be agreeable to the best ideas we can form of his governing wisdom, righteousness, and goodness; for it only signifies, that when sinners forsake their evil ways, God is graciously pleased to change the methods of his dealings towards them, and is willing to receive them to his grace and favour. But in reality there is no change in the divine purposes or counsels. The change that is wrought is in the mind and temper of the sinner; God acts uniformly according to the stated rules of his administrations; and nothing has happened but what he perfectly foreknew."* But re-

* His Lordship seems to think it an unanswerable objection against the Mosiac writings, that in the account there given of the flood, God is represented as having "repented that he made man."

But it is manifest, that this is only an emphatical way of expression, to signify God's just displeasure at the great and universal wickedness of mankind, and at their having so far fallen from the noble end of their creation; and that therefore, after having tried the methods of indulgence towards them, he saw fit to send a destructive deluge for exterminating that incorrigible race. And it is plain, that according to the doctrine of the sacred writings, which every where represent God as foreknowing the actions of men, this corruption of mankind was what he foresaw from the beginning; and the punishing them in this manner made a part of the original scheme of divine providence, though it did not actually take effect till the proper time came for executing it. As to what he mentions in a sneering way, concerning God's *smelling the sweet savour* of

pening, in a strict and proper sense, as it is a mark of human imperfection and mutability, is expressly denied of God in the holy scripture; where we are assured, that *God is not as the son of man that he should repent.*

As to the expressions of anger, wrath, fury, hatred, vengeance, as ascribed to God in the sacred writings, it is a thing so obvious that it can scarce be mistaken, that these are only strong expressions, designed to impress the hearts of men with a more lively sense of God's righteous displeasure against sin and wickedness, and resolution to punish it; which it is of the highest importance to mankind to consider and believe. Any one that allows himself to think impartially, must be sensible, that such ways of representing things are absolutely necessary in a revelation designed for common use; and that it is far more for the good of the world in general, and for promoting the interests of virtue, and restraining vice and wickedness, that men should conceive of God as loving and taking pleasure in the good and righteous, and as full of just resentment against evil-doers, than as utterly unconcerned about the actions and affairs of men, or alike affected towards the righteous and the wicked. Yea, the former notions are not only more useful, and of better influence, but more just and rational in themselves, and more worthy of the All-perfect Being. For what idea is this of God, to represent him as neither delighting in order and virtue, nor displeased with vice and wickedness, but solacing himself in an eternal indolence, and no-way concerned about the good or ill-behaviour, the happiness or misery of his reasonable creatures! A God destitute of all affections, or of any thing correspondent to them, would not be the most perfect Being. There are spiritual affections, which have nothing to do with body, and which as properly belong to spirits or minds, as intellect or will; and I can as easily suppose them destitute of the latter as of the former. Our affections indeed have usually a great mixture of bodily passions, and consequently of imperfection; but there are affections of a nobler kind, and which we may conceive in pure spirits; yea, they cannot be conceived without them; nor can we avoid ascribing some affections, or what is analagous or equivalent to them, to God, provided we remove from them all those imperfections and defects with which they are attended in us. A love of order, goodness, purity, virtue, and a just detestation of moral evil, is absolutely inseparable from the idea of the Infinitely-perfect Being, the most wise and righteous Governor of the world.

I shall conclude my observations on this part of Lord Bolingbroke's book with a passage from an author whom no man will suppose to

Noah's burnt offering, it is sufficient to observe, that the design of the expression is plain and easily intelligible, viz. to signify God's gracious acceptance of the act of devotion performed by that good man, to acknowledge his gratitude, and implore the divine mercy; and that on that occasion God was pleased, after having made so signal a display of his justice, to allay and dissipate the fears which might be apt to arise in the hearts of men, and to assure them of his merciful intentions towards them, and that he would not any more send an universal deluge upon the earth; of which the rainbow in the clouds should be a constant memorial.

have been prejudiced in favour of the Scriptures; it is Mr. Anthony Collins, in an *Essay*, which he published in 1707, *concerning the Use of Reason in Propositions, the Evidence whereof depends upon Human Testimony*. After having observed, that "one use of reason in things which by the testimony of men are supposed to come from God, is to endeavour to find out such a sense of a supposed divine revelation as is agreeable to the discoveries of our reason, if the words under any kind of construction will bear it, though at first view they may seem repugnant to reason, and to one another;" he adds, "this is certainly a great piece of justice, and what is due to words that upon the least evidence can be supposed to come from God, especially since expressions that do literally quadrate with the maxims of reason and philosophy, are necessary to make a revelation have any effect upon common people's minds. For was not God to be represented by expressions, which, literally understood, attribute to him human passions and actions, they who by their occupations in the world are incapable of those more just ideas which men of thought know to belong to that Being, would perhaps think him incapable of taking cognizance of their actions; and therefore to make a revelation *useful* and *credible in itself*, it must consist of words whose *literal* meaning is false, but whose *real* meaning is consistent with the justest notions of reason and philosophy. And therefore we ought to examine whether the words under any construction will bear a reasonable sense," p. 17, 18. Mr. Collins then applies this observation to the revelation which we acknowledge, and considers those passages of scripture where God is said to *rest*, *repent*, *be angry*, &c. It must be owned, that this gentleman judges much more reasonably and equitably in this matter than Lord Bolingbroke has done.

This may suffice at present. In my next I shall consider the other objections which his Lordship hath urged against the divine authority of the Scriptures of the Old Testament, especially of the Mosaic writings.

LETTER XXX.

Farther Objections against the Mosaic Writings and the Scriptures of the Old Testament considered.—The Laws of Moses not contrary to the Law of Nature.—This particularly shown with regard to the command for exterminating the Canaanites, and the Law for punishing those among the Israelites that should revolt to Idolatry with Death.—The Law of Moses not accountable for the Fury of the Zealots.—The Instances of Phineas and Mattathias considered.—Insociability not the first Principle of the Law of Moses, nor did that Law take the Jews out of all Moral Obligations to the rest of Mankind.—There is nothing false or absurd in the Mosaical Account of the Creation of the World and the Fall of Man.—Concerning the Sanctions of the Law of Moses.—The not making express Mention of Future Rewards and Punishments in that Law, no Argument against its divine Original.—Some other Objections against the Scriptures obviated.

SIR,

I now proceed to another set of objections, which are designed to show that some of the laws of Moses are absolutely contrary to the law of nature, which is the law of God, and therefore cannot come from him. He instances particularly in the command for exterminating the Canaanites, and the law for punishing idolaters among the Israelites with death. "In both which," he says, "it is supposed impiously, against principles as self-evident as any of those necessary truths which are such of all knowledge, that the Supreme Being commands by one law what he forbids by another;"* and that "he approved and commanded, on particular occasions, the most abominable violations of the general laws of nature."† I shall consider what he has offered with regard to each of these.

As to the command for exterminating the Canaanites, it is what he frequently inveighs against, as the greatest piece of injustice and cruelty that ever was committed.‡ And he has pronounced, that "the men who justify such cruelties upon any hypothesis whatsoever, must have very ill hearts as well as heads:" and that "he who imputes them to the Supreme Being is worse than an atheist, though he pass for a saint."§ I shall venture, however, to examine what this rigid censurer has offered on this subject.

He first layeth it down as a principle, that "God cannot command in particular, what he forbids in general. He who has made benevolence to all rational beings the fundamental law of our nature, can never command some to rob or to murder others; to usurp on the rights of their fellow-creatures, and to exterminate whole nations."|| The force of his argument here lies wholly in the words *rob* and *murder*, both which carry the idea of depriving others of their lives and properties, without a just cause, and without lawful authority. But though God has forbidden us, both in the law of nature and in the decalogue, to murder, he can command some to put others to death for just causes, in which case it is not murder. He never, by giving this law to mankind, divested himself of the dominion he hath over the lives of his creatures. He can also commission, for wise ends, some to deprive others of their properties. For the law of nature is always to be understood with this limitation, except in cases where God himself shall otherwise appoint. It is no principle of that law, that God can never without injustice exterminate nations. That he can do it in a way of immediate judgment, by sending destructive calamities, famines, pestilences, earthquakes, deluges, and the like, cannot be denied by any theist who believes a providence governing mankind, and interposing in the affairs of men. And if he can do it immediately himself, he can commission men to do it, provided he gives sufficient credentials of

* Works, vol. v. p. 180. † Ibid. p. 181. ‡ See particularly vol. iii. p. 305.
vol. v. p. 99. 146. § Vol. iii. p. 306. || Vol. v. p. 99.

that commission; and such the Israelites had, according to the accounts given in the books of Moses. And in judging of the case, how far it is justifiable, we must take it in all its circumstances as there represented. Our author himself supposes the miracles done among them, if really done, to be sufficient to convince all mankind, not only at that time, but in all succeeding generations to the end of the world, of the divine authority of that law and constitution; and therefore sufficient to convince the people of Israel. All therefore that remained was, that they should be satisfied of the truth of the facts, and of this they could not doubt, as they were done before their eyes. And the same books which give an account of the facts, give an account of the divine commission to the Israelites, and the reasons and ends of it. And whereas it is urged, that "the Canaanites were obnoxious to the divine vengeance in no other respect than that which was common to them with all the heathen nations, namely, their idolatry."* This is not true according to the account given by Moses, Lev. xviii. 24, 25, 27. whereby it appears, that it was not merely for their idolatry, but for their monstrous vices and wickedness of all kinds, that they were ordered to be exterminated; and that never was there upon earth a more profligate and abandoned race of men. And supposing this to be true, and that God had determined to signalize his righteous vengeance against them in the severest manner, he might, without any pretence for arraigning the justice of his proceedings, have consumed them by fire from heaven, as he did part of them at Sodom and Gomorrah, or have overwhelmed them with an inundation, or have swallowed them up by an earthquake, and thereby utterly destroyed that people, their little ones as well as the adult. Nor could it have been said in such a case, that this was contrary to the law of nature. But then it would not have been so apparent, that this calamity was inflicted in a way of punishment for their idolatry and detestable wickedness. It might have been possibly attributed to some natural cause, or have been regarded as an unaccountable and fortuitous event; but when they were ordered to be exterminated for their abominable crimes by an express command of God, attested by a series of the most amazing miracles and divine interpositions, and this appointed to be executed by another nation, who were peculiarly set apart by their original constitution to the acknowledgment and adoration of the one true God, and of him only, and to whom God had given the most holy and excellent laws; at the same time threatening them with the like punishments if they committed the like crimes; in this case the reason of the judgment was as apparent, as when a malefactor is put to death by an officer of justice for a crime, in execution of the sentence of a just magistrate. Nor is there any thing in such a procedure that can be proved to be inconsistent with the wisdom and righteousness of the Supreme Being, or contradictory to his own laws; since there is no law of nature that debars God from executing judgments on parti-

* Works, vol. v. p. 181.

cular persons, or guilty nations, for their crimes and vices, even to extermination, or from employing, if he thinks fit, one or more nations to execute his judgments upon others. Nor has this confident and assuming writer brought any proof that it is so. As to his comparing the invasion of Canaan by the Israelites, and what they did there, to the cruelties exercised by the Spaniards in America,* and to the ravages of the Huns under Attila, who, he says, were much more merciful than they,† there is this vast difference between the cases, that the latter had no motive or pretence, but their own ambition, avarice and cruelty, whereas the former did it in execution of the express command of God, and by a commission from him, the truth of which was confirmed by a series of the most extraordinary divine attestations that ever the world saw. This, therefore can be no precedent to any other nation to do the like, except they can produce the same or equal proofs of a divine commission; which no other since have been able to do, and probably never will. This may suffice with regard to the command for the extermination of the Canaanites; which I have elsewhere considered more largely. See "Answer to Christianity as old as the Creation, vol. ii. p. 429. 437; and the "Answer to Morgan, vol. ii. p. 97. et. seq.

The other command produced by this author to prove that the law of Moses is contrary to the law of nature, and therefore cannot be of divine original, is the law for putting a false prophet to death that should attempt to seduce the people to idolatry, and for the inflicting a capital punishment upon any particular person among the Israelites that should revolt to idolatry, and even destroying a city that should do so. Concerning this, he very dogmatically pronounces: "I say, that the law of nature is the law of God. Of this I have the same demonstrative knowledge that I have of the existence of God, the all-perfect Being. I say, that the all-perfect Being cannot contradict himself; that he would contradict himself, if the laws contained in the thirteenth chapter of Deuteronomy were his laws, since they contradict those of nature; and, therefore, that they are not his laws. Of all this I have as certain, as intuitive a knowledge, as I have that two and two are equal to four, or that the whole is bigger than a part."‡ A very short and decisive determination of the controversy! But we are by this time too well acquainted with his Lordship's manner, to lay any great stress on his positive assertions, though delivered with the most assuming air.

The argument he makes use of here is the same that he had used before, namely, that the law of nature forbids murder. This will be easily allowed. But it is not inconsistent with that law which forbids murder, to put persons to death who are guilty of crimes that by the fundamental laws of the community deserve death. If God should have enacted a general law obligatory on all mankind, that whosoever should commit idolatry, or worship any other god, should be put to death, as well as that any man that should

* Works, vol. iii. p. 305.

† Ibid. vol. v. p. 148.

‡ Ibid. p. 191.

shed the blood of another without cause should be put to death; this author might be challenged, with all his confidence, to prove that such a divine law would be contradictory to the law of nature. Idolatry, by his own acknowledgment, is forbidden in the law of nature, and is a breach of the first and great article of that law; and he represents it as *one of the greatest of crimes*.^{*} But God has not thought fit to enact a general law obligatory on all mankind for punishing idolaters with death, and without his appointment it ought not to be executed. But when it pleased him for wise ends to select a particular nation, among them to erect a peculiar sacred polity, and to appoint that the adoration of the one true God, and of him only, should be the very basis of their constitution, on which all their privileges, their national properties, and their right to their country, depended, it is evident that under such a constitution to revolt to idolatry and polytheism, was, in the most criminal sense to be traitors to the community; and to arraign a law for inflicting a capital punishment upon idolaters under that particular constitution is highly absurd. Nor could any thing be more just in such a case, than to order that a false prophet, who should endeavour to seduce the people to idolatry, should be put to death; though this writer objects against it as unjust, for this strange reason, that "miracles were daily, and almost hourly, wrought in the sight of all Israel."[†] This is absolutely false, if understood of miracles strictly so called; or if it were true, it is an odd thing to urge, that which made the crime of the false prophet the greater, to be a reason for exempting him from punishment.

But what he chiefly finds fault with, is the law for destroying any Israelitish city, that should fall off to the worship of idols, Deut. xiii. 13—16. He urges, that "the innocent were to be involved in the same punishment with the guilty; neither man, nor woman, nor beast, neither the brother, the daughter, the wife, nor the friend, was to be spared; and that the whole chapter is such an edict as could not be imputed to Attila without injustice." And after exclaiming against the obstinacy of those that pretend to justify the law of Moses in this instance, he observes, that "by that law the undistinguishing extermination of collective bodies, and especially for matters of opinion, is allowed."[‡] And afterwards, arguing against Mr. Locke, he adds, that "even supposing God to be their King, the objections of injustice and cruelty in those laws will remain in their full force; and that to suppose him to have given these laws would be to degrade the All-perfect Being to the character of an unjust and cruel tyrant, who authorized and even commanded his ministers expressly, to punish without measure, without discernment, and without forms of justice."[§] And he insinuates, that there are precepts in that chapter, "from which the inquisition copied the instructions she gives to her familiars."^{||} But this is a gross misrepresentation. He himself elsewhere observes, that "the

^{*} Works, vol. v. p. 195. [†] Ibid. p. 183. [‡] Ibid. p. 184. [§] Ibid. p. 194.
^{||} Ibid. p. 183.

cruel principle of persecution for opinions "was never known till Christians introduced it into the world;"* though contrary, as he owns, to the true spirit of the Gospel. And it is manifest, that the punishments referred to, Deut. xiii. were not to be inflicted for matters of opinion but of practice, for open acts of idolatry, in subversion of the fundamental constitution of their state; and great care was to be taken, that the punishment should not be executed without due inquiry, and full proof. They were to *inquire*, and *make search*, and *ask diligently*, so as to be assured that it was *truth*, and the *thing certain*. Great deliberation was to be used; and except the whole city was obstinately addicted to idolatry, and determined to persist in it, they were not to be exterminated. And considering the design and nature of that peculiar constitution, a decree or law, for exterminating a city among themselves that should revolt to the worship of false gods, seemed necessary, and was like the cutting off a corrupt or gangrened limb, which was requisite to save the whole. If God had, at the original establishment of that polity, declared that he himself would in an immediate way by pestilence, or fire from heaven, or some other extraordinary judgment, exterminate or destroy any city among them that should revolt to the worship of idols, it could not be pretended, that this would have been unjust, though children as well as adult would be involved in it. But he chose that the punishment should be inflicted in a judicial way by the hands of the magistrates, and by the authority of the nation or whole community, pursuant to a law for that purpose. And the punishment was both ordered to be executed with great solemnity, and to be attended with circumstances of peculiar severity, so as to proceed to utter extermination, the more effectually to create a horror and detestation of the crime, and to show that so wicked a race was to be entirely destroyed. To which it must be added, that this punishment was denounced in consequence of the original contract or covenant between God and that people. By coming into that covenant for themselves and their children, they voluntarily subjected themselves and them to the severest penalties in case of a revolt. And considering the mighty advantages they had as a nation by the theocracy, and by their peculiar constitution, and the signal blessings that would have followed upon their obedience, it was a condition which could not be reasonably objected against, since they might so easily avoid the threatened calamities, by obedience to a law so just and agreeable to reason, as is that of the worship of the one true God, the Lord of the universe, and of him only.

And to have legally tolerated any among them, whether particular persons or communities, that should openly revolt to idolatry, would have been manifestly absurd, and absolutely subversive of their whole polity.

This writer takes particular notice of "the rights the zealots assumed to assassinate any Jew that should seem to them to violate,

* Works, vol. v. p. 313.

by public and strong appearances, the sanctity of the Divinity, of the temple, and of the nation ;” and that “this produced such scenes of horror among Jews as no other nation ever produced.” It will be owned, that the zealots in the latter times of the Jewish state carried this to an excess of madness and fury ; but the law is not accountable for it. It is evident from the thirteenth chapter of Deuteronomy, which orders the punishment of those that should revolt to idolatry, that the whole was to be transacted in an orderly and legal way, with great deliberation, and by public authority. And the same thing is repeated, Deut. xvii. 2, 3, 4, 5, 6. where it is ordained, that with regard to any particular person that had served other gods, they should, before they punished him, *inquire and search diligently*. And it is expressly appointed, that at *the mouth of two or three witnesses* he should be put to death, but that *at the mouth of one witness* he should not be put to death. Nor does Lord Bolingbroke pretend to produce any law to authorize the madness of the zealots. He only mentions two instances, which, he thinks, countenanced it, viz. that of Phineas, and that of Mattathias. As to the former, he says, “Phineas murdered Zimri and Cosbi in the act of fornication.” But this was not a simple act of fornication. It was joined with avowed idolatry, and, as it was circumstanced, was a most insolent defiance of all law and authority, one of the most flagrant crimes, in open opposition to God and man, that could be committed. The person who inflicted the punishment was himself a chief magistrate, of high authority, and in a case which needed no proof, and admitted of no delay, when a plague from God was broke out among the people, on the account of that very crime which these persons so impudently avowed ; and it was also in consequence of an order which Moses had given by the command of God to the Judges of Israel, to slay those that were joined to Baal Peor—Numbers xxv. 4, 5. So that Phineas had full legal authority for what he did. And therefore this was no warrant to those who without any authority assassinated any man they thought fit, under pretence of his violating the law, of which they set up themselves for judges. As to the instance of Mattathias, our author observes, that “in the fury of his holy zeal he rushed on the Jew that was about to sacrifice in obedience to the edict of Antiochus, and on the officer appointed to take care of the execution of the edict, and murdered them both.”* That we may judge of this, it is to be considered, that never was there a greater tyrant than Antiochus. He had entirely subverted the whole Jewish constitution, abolished the ancient laws, and massacred the people. If ever there was a just foundation for rising up in defence of religion, law, and liberty, here was an occasion that loudly called for it. In these circumstances Mattathias, who was not a mere private person, but *a ruler, and a great and honourable man* in the city of Modin where he dwelt, slew a Jew, who was then openly committing a crime, for which by the fundamental laws of his country he ought to have suf-

* Works, vol v. p. 180.

ferred death, but at a time when no legal justice in the usual forms could be had. He also killed the King's officer, who was then compelling the people to subvert the laws. This he designed as a signal to the insurrection which he immediately began; an insurrection fully justifiable, if ever any was so, and which was carried on with a noble spirit and fortitude, and with a success that ended in the subversion of the horrid tyranny, and the happy restoration of their liberties and laws. Such an action, so circumstanced as that of Mattathias, if it had been performed by a Greek or Roman, in opposition to horrid barefaced tyranny and cruelty, and in vindication of the essential laws and liberties of his country, would have been highly celebrated, and transmitted to all succeeding ages as a most glorious act of heroism.

The only thing farther that I shall mention is, what he observes concerning "the massacre which the Levites made of three thousand men in one day, when they were commanded, without any other form of proceeding, to take every man his sword, and to slay his neighbour."* This must be owned to be an extraordinary punishment, and the occasion was extraordinary. The revolt of the people was the most inexcusable, by this writer's own acknowledgment, that could be supposed. It happened when the law had been just promulgated with the most amazing solemnity, and the constitution established, to which they had given their own consent. The body of the people had thereby exposed themselves to destruction; and if they had been consumed in an immediate way by a plague, or fire, or some extraordinary judgment from heaven, it was no more than they deserved. It was necessary that so open, so public, so aggravated a revolt and insurrection against the majesty and authority of the supreme universal Lord, to whom they themselves had so lately in the most solemn manner vowed subjection and obedience, should be distinguished with marks of great severity. In cases of crimes where great numbers have been concerned, it has sometimes been thought just to decimate them, to make one in ten suffer the death they all deserved. But here of above six hundred thousand, three thousand only suffered, not above the twonhundredth part of the whole. The numbers that were concerned rendered the trying each of them in a formal process, which is what he seems to require, impracticable. Nor was there any need of it. The fact was public and notorious; and the persons that suffered were undoubtedly such as were known to be most guilty, and to have been most active in promoting the defection and revolt. And the immediate punishment of these was the most speedy way of quelling the insurrection, and bringing the whole body to a sense of their guilt and of their duty.

The third objection I proposed to take notice of, as raised by this writer against the Mosaic economy, is this: That "the first principles, and the whole tenor of the Jewish laws, took that people out of all moral obligations to the rest of mankind: That they were

* Works, vol. v. p. 146.

taught to think themselves a chosen race, distinct from the rest of mankind, and who were far from owing to other men, what other men owed to them, and to one another. This produced a legal injustice and cruelty in their whole conduct, authorized by their law, and pressed upon them by their priests and prophets."* And he elsewhere observes, that "the first principle of their polity, ecclesiastical and civil, was insociability; and accordingly their manners were rendered unsuitable to the common nature and genius of mankind."†

This is a heavy charge; but, if closely examined, this insociability amounteth to no more than this: That they had not a community of religion and rites with the heathens, as the heathens had with one another, and which they could not have without absolutely destroying and defeating the end of their most excellent constitution; that they were not to intermarry with idolaters, and were obliged to keep close to the observation of their own peculiar laws and customs; several of which were designed to preserve them as a distinct body from mixing and incorporating with other nations. And considering how different their constitution was from that which obtained in other countries; that all the world about them was immersed in idolatry and polytheism, and that they themselves were very apt to fall in with the idolatrous customs of the neighbouring nations, and to which mankind in all ages have been very prone; considering these things, if great care had not been taken to keep them distinct, by several peculiar rites and customs, and to hinder them from intermarrying with their idolatrous neighbours, they could not possibly have preserved their constitution; they must have been soon mixed and confounded with other nations; the consequence of which would have been, that they would have fallen into a conformity to their religion and worship, and have lost their own. And so the whole design of that admirable polity, so well fitted to preserve the knowledge and worship of the one true God, and of him only, in opposition to the universally-prevailing polytheism and idolatry, would have been defeated; and all nations would have been involved in the same common idolatry, and perhaps have continued in it to this day. For, according to the plan laid by the divine wisdom, Judaism prepared the way for Christianity; and all that is good in Mahometanism is derived from the one or the other of these. But though the people of Israel were obliged thus to keep themselves distinct, and though none were regarded as strictly and properly incorporated into their body who did not conform to the peculiar laws of their polity, they were not obliged to confine their benevolence to those of their own nation. They were directed, by many express precepts in their law, to show great kindness to those of other nations, to the strangers that passed through their land, or that sojourned among them; to exercise great humanity towards them, and serve them in all friendly offices. This is not only allowed, but strongly

* Works, vol. iii. p. 290. See also *ibid.* p. 283.

† *Ibid.* vol. v. p. 148. See also *ibid.* p. 198.

pressed upon them in their law, as any one will be convinced that impartially considers the passages referred to at the bottom of the page.* And the Jews themselves observe, that the precepts prescribing a kind conduct towards strangers are inculcated one-and-twenty times in the law.

It is mere calumny and abuse to say, that the Jews were authorized by their law, and pressed by their prophets, to exercise cruelty and injustice towards the rest of mankind; and that they were absolved from all moral obligations, and from all rules of justice, equity, and fidelity with regard to them. Nor was there any thing in their law to oblige them to persecute others for their opinions in religion, or to compel them to conform to their peculiar rites. On the contrary, they allowed those of any other nation to dwell among them, and to worship at the temple, where there was a court provided for them who worshipped the one true God, the maker and preserver of all things, though they did not observe the rites which were peculiarly prescribed to those of their own body. And how happy would it have been, if the principles of toleration had been always carried thus far among those of other professions!

Their looking upon themselves to be God's chosen people ought to have engaged them to great thankfulness to God for such eminent advantages, and to have put them upon distinguishing themselves by the pure practice of religion and every virtue, that they might walk worthy of their character and privileges; if they abused this to pride and insolence, the fault was not in their law, but in themselves. Mankind have been always too prone to abuse their real or supposed advantages. The Greeks regarded the rest of the world as *barbarians*. And Socrates is introduced by Plato, in his fifth book of laws, as directing the Greeks to regard the *barbarians* as *by nature their enemies*, and as prescribing a conduct towards them which is little reconcileable to the common rules of humanity. Christians cannot but look upon it as their great advantage, that they are distinguished from many other nations which are sunk in the grossest ignorance and barbarism. And it would argue the most inexcusable stupidity and ingratitude not to be very thankful to providence on this account. But this is no just reason for treating those nations with contempt and cruelty.

The fourth objection which was mentioned was, that there are several passages in the scriptures which are false, absurd, and unphilosophical. And he particularly instances in the account there given of the creation of the world, and the fall of man.

With respect to the former, he says, "It is impossible to read what Moses writ on that subject, without feeling contempt for him as a philosopher; and horror as a divine. For he is to be considered under both these characters."† And he takes upon him to pronounce, that "we cannot admit Moses's testimony concerning the beginning of the world for divine, without absurdity and blasphemy."‡

* Lev. xix. 24. xxv. 35. Numb. xxvi. 11. Deut. x. 17, 18, 19. xxiv. 19, 20, 21, 22.

† Works, vol. iii. p. 231. 283.

‡ Ibid. p. 308.

There cannot in my opinion be a greater instance of the most unreasonable prejudice, than the objections that have been raised against the authority of Moses, from the account he gives of the creation. Whosoever will take the pains impartially to compare it with the accounts left us in the traditions of the most ancient nations, concerning which the reader may see the introduction to the *Universal History*, relating to the *Cosmogony, or the Creation of the World*, will find the account given by Moses so vastly superior, as will naturally lead him to regard it as of an higher original. There is a majesty and sublimity, as well as simplicity and plainness in it, which hath greatly recommended it to the best judges. Nothing could be so proper to answer the design he had in view, as to begin his book with an account of the creation of the world. If he had merely asserted in general, that God created the world, and all things that are therein, this would not have made such an impression upon the people as was proper and necessary in a matter of such vast importance, and which, according to the author's own observation, "leads to the acknowledgment of the Supreme Being, by a proof levelled to the meanest understanding."* And therefore it was proper to give them more distinct notions of the formation of things by the divine power and wisdom. Accordingly he distinctly mentions the light, the firmament, the sun, the moon, and stars, the earth, the sea, the plants, and vegetable products of the earth, the various kinds of animals, and lastly, man himself; and assures them, that these various appearances were not owing to a variety of causes, which, according to Lord Bolingbroke, the first men in the rude uncultivated ages would be naturally led to believe, but were all owing to one and the same glorious original cause and author. It is evident, that what was principally designed was to give an account of the formation of our system, as far as relates particularly to our earth; at the same time assuring them, that the sun, moon, and stars, all the heavenly bodies, which the nations were apt to adore, were created by God. The whole is represented as having been effected with an Almighty facility. That God only spoke or commanded, and it was done. All things were created by the word of his power, which tends to give a noble idea of the power and majesty of the great Creator. Yet this great work, according to Moses, was carried on in an orderly progressive way. There is a general account given of the visible and successive changes wrought each day upon the face of the earth till it was completed. But our author, who is determined on every supposition to find fault with the Mosaic account, blames Moses for representing the solar system, or even this our planet, as having been the work of six days. He thinks "such precipitation seems repugnant to that general order of nature which God established, and which he observes in his productions."† As if the first formation of things must necessarily have been carried on in the slow way which is now observed, after the order and course of nature is once established. It is perfectly

* Works, vol. iii. p. 253.

† Ibid. p. 233.

agreeable to reason to believe that the first formation of the world, and the several species of things in it, did not take up a long space of time; and yet there is no reason to think that it was all perfected in an instant, without any intervals, though it would have been easy to the divine power to have done so. And this writer, who seems here to think the creation as represented by Moses to have been too much precipitated, and accomplished in too short a time, seems elsewhere to think that it was too slowly carried on. For he says, "we must not conceive the world to have been made by a laborious progression—God willed it to exist, and it existed."*

As to the particular order in which the creation was carried on, according to the account given by Moses, this writer, with all his confidence, has not been able to prove, that there is any thing in it inconsistent with reason or with true philosophy: though he has passed a severe censure on those who have endeavoured to "reconcile the Mosaic account to reason and nature, and to wrest natural philosophy into an agreement with it."† He instances in Moses's saying, that "light was created, and the distinction of night and day, of evening and morning, was made, before the sun, the moon, and the stars."‡ But we know so little of the real nature of light, that no man can pretend positively to determine, that it could not have made its appearance before the sun and moon and planets were completed in their present form and order. As it seems to be the noblest substance in the material world, it is reasonable to believe, that at the first formation of things it was first created, or at least separated from the chaotic mass, and put in motion, so as to make a distinction between light and darkness, and some kind of succession and vicissitude of the one and the other, answering to day and night, evening and morning: though it is evident, from the account given of the work of the fourth day, that it was not till then that the sun, moon, and stars, were rendered conspicuous to the earth, and the order and course of things fully settled, so as to cause the proper distinction of times and seasons, days, months, years; for which reason no notice is taken of the formation of those heavenly bodies till that day. It is to little purpose to say, as his Lordship has done, that "Moses was as ignorant of the true system of the universe as any of the people of his age." This is more than he can prove. But if it were so, it was not necessary, supposing him inspired as a prophet or a lawgiver, that he should be inspired also with a knowledge of the true system of philosophy and astronomy. Or, if he had been ever so well acquainted with it, it would have been altogether improper to have given an exactly philosophical account of the creation; nor could any such account of it have been given, considering the different systems of philosophy that have obtained, but what would have been as much found fault with, and perhaps more, than that which he has given. The truth is, such an account would have been no way accommodated to the capacities of the people; it would have perplexed and confounded, instead of

* Works, vol. iv. p. 111.

† Ibid. p. 181.

‡ Ibid. vol. iii. p. 301.

instructing them. It was proper, for many reasons, that the account should be drawn up in a popular way, and yet in a way that is at the bottom agreeable to the real truth of things. So the moon is very fitly called a *great light*, and it may be truly called so, because it yields great light to us, though, strictly and philosophically speaking, it has no light of its own at all. And now, after all our improvements in philosophy and astronomy, we still speak of the light of the moon, of the sun's motion, rising, and setting.—And the man that in a moral or theological, or in an historical discourse, would use a different language, would only render himself ridiculous.

Lord Bolingbroke farther objects, that though Moses ascribes the creation to God, “yet when God proceeds to the creation of man, he calls in other beings to co-operate with him, and make man in his and their image. This seems to lay a foundation for polytheism, which is inconsistent with that unity of God which my reason shows me, and which the general tenor even of the Mosaic history attests.”* And since by his own acknowledgment the general tenor of the Mosaic writings leads us to assert the unity of God, this plainly shows that the passage he refers to was not designed to infer polytheism. And if there be something unusual in the manner of expression, it must be interpreted in a consistency with the whole Mosaic law; nor can it be supposed that Moses intended it otherwise. And this plainly appears from the very passage itself, considered in its connexion. For after having told us, Gen. i. ver. 26. that *God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness*: he adds, ver. 27. *And God created man in his image, in the image of God created he him*: where it is plain, that what it expressed plurally in one verse is singular in the other: and that the design of those expressions, *Let us make man in our image*, was not to signify that other beings joined with God in the formation of man, and in making him in their as well as God's image; since it is expressly declared in the words immediately following, that *God created man in his own image*, and for the greater emphasis, and as it were on purpose to prevent such a construction, it is again repeated, *in the image of God created he him*. I would observe by the way, how much nobler the account is, that is given by Moses of the formation of man, than that which was given by the ancient Egyptians, of whose wisdom and philosophy our author speaks in such high terms, and from whom he would have us believe Moses derived all his wisdom and knowledge. They taught, as he observes from Diodorus Siculus, that “the first of human kind were quickened into life by the sun, and were animated systems of mud.” And he thinks, that “if we are persuaded that this world had a beginning in time, we must of necessity assume, that the first man and the first woman, or that one man and one woman at least, were produced in full strength and vigour of body and mind.”† This is agreeable to the Mosaic account, which is perfectly consistent with reason, though there is no great likelihood that reason alone could

* Works, vol. iii. p. 300.

† Ibid. vol. v. p. 107, 108.

have assured us of it; for, as his Lordship there observes, "how men came into the world, reason will tell us no better than history or tradition does." This therefore is a proper subject of divine revelation.

It argues a strange disposition to find fault, to lay such a stress as Lord Bolingbroke has done, upon that particular manner of expression Moses makes use of, that God *rested the seventh day from all his work*, as if it were alone sufficient to destroy the authority of the Mosaic writings. No man that impartially considers the noble account there given of the creation, that God is represented as having only spoke and it was done, can reasonably imagine, that the design of those expressions was to signify, that God was *wearied with the laborious work of creation*, as our author expresses it, and needed rest after it, as men do who are tired with their work. *Hast thou not known*, saith the prophet Isaiah, *Hast thou not heard, that the everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary?* Isaiah xl. 28. All therefore that can be understood by that manner of expression, is only this, that God had then finished the work of the creation, and had a divine complacency in it.

As to the Mosaic account of the fall of man, it is what his Lordship has frequently endeavoured to expose. And it has been a constant subject of ridicule to the deistical writers in every age. But if it be candidly and impartially examined, as it stands connected with the account given by Moses of man's original dignity, it will appear to be of great importance, and to furnish instructions of excellent use.

The account given by Moses of the state in which man was at first created, is short, but such as tends to give a noble idea of his dignity; as having been created in the image of God, in a state of purity and innocence, and invested with a dominion over all the other creatures in this lower world. His Lordship, in a passage cited above, says, that "supposing the world to have had a beginning in time, we must of necessity assume, that the first man and the first woman, or that one man and one woman at least, were produced in full strength and vigour of body and mind." And indeed man cannot reasonably be supposed to have been at first created in a state of infancy, for then he must soon have perished. He was therefore formed in a state of maturity, as were the other animals, and undoubtedly in a sound and happy constitution of body; and it is equally reasonable to suppose that he was created in an answerable perfection of mind: and that consequently there was in man at his first creation a perfect harmony and just balance in the several faculties of his nature, that his intellectual and moral powers were sound and clear, and uncorrupt, his appetites and passions in a state of just subjection to reason and the law of the mind, and his affections rightly disposed. Here then is a state of moral rectitude, in which, according to all the dictates of reason and good sense, man must be supposed to have been created. Nor

can any thing be more absurd than to suppose, that this noble creature, who was constituted lord of this inferior creation, the crown and ornament of God's works here below, made his first appearance in the world, as a huge over-grown infant, in full vigour indeed and beauty of body, but a mere child in understanding, and with a soul utterly unfurnished. It is reasonable to believe, that he that made him would not turn him out into the world absolutely destitute of knowledge and ideas, but that he immediately endued him with so much knowledge of things, especially of his Maker, of the creation of the world, and of his duty, as qualified him for answering the ends of his being. Moses informs us, that great things were done for him by the beneficent Creator: that he was pleased, in his great goodness, to provide a peculiarly delightful seat for the entertainment of his innocent creature, a blissful paradise, where he was placed amidst a profusion of joys. And as there was none among the inferior animals that were put under his dominion, with whom he could cultivate that society and friendship for which his nature was formed, it pleased God to make another creature of his own kind, bone of his bone, and flesh of his flesh, adorned with all the charms of beauty and innocence, to whom he was to be united in the dearest ties of love. And from them was to proceed a race of creatures of the same species.

In this state man was undoubtedly obliged by the law of his creation to obey and adore his Creator and Sovereign Lord and Benefactor, and to yield a ready obedience to all his known commands. But though universal obedience was his duty, Moses acquaints us, that there was a particular command given him by way of trial. Nor was there any thing in this unbecoming the Supreme Wisdom and Goodness. Since God was pleased to constitute him lord of this inferior creation, and had given him so large a grant, and so many advantages, it was manifestly proper, in the nature of things, that he should require some particular instance of homage and fealty, to put him in mind that he was under the dominion of a higher Lord, on whom he depended, and to whom he owed an unreserved subjection. And what properer instance could there be, in the circumstances man was then in, than his being obliged, in obedience to the divine command, to abstain from one or more of the delicious fruits of paradise? It pleased God to insist only upon his abstaining from one, at the same time that he indulged him a full liberty as to all the rest. And this served both as an act of homage to the Supreme Lord, from whose bountiful grant he held paradise, and all its enjoyments, and it was also fitted to teach him a noble and useful lesson of abstinence and self-denial, one of the most important lessons in a state of probation, and also of unreserved submission to God's authority and will, and an implicit resignation to his sovereign wisdom and goodness. It tended to habituate him to keep his sensitive appetite in a perfect subjection to the law of reason, in which consists the proper order and harmony of the human nature, and to take him off from too close an attachment to

sensible good, and also to keep his desire after knowledge within just bounds, so as to be content with knowing what is good and useful, and not to pry with an unwarrantable curiosity into things that it did not belong to him to know.

Moses farther informs us, that our first parents transgressed the command given them for the trial of their obedience, by eating the forbidden fruit. How they came to do this, when they were created innocent and upright, may seem strange, and really is so. But the same objection might have been made with regard to the first sin, or transgression of the divine law, whenever it happened, whether among men or angels. For, except we suppose them to have been created actually depraved, or under a necessity of sinning, which would be to make God himself the author of sin, they must have been formed in a state of purity and rectitude, and capable of keeping the law of God, which was given them as the rule of their obedience: and then the difficulty would recur, how came they to fall and disobey, when they might so easily have stood and continued in their obedience? All that can be said, is, that man, though created upright, and without any wrong affections or dispositions, yet was a free agent, and therefore had it in his power to disobey. The account given by Moses of the first sin is very short. There were probably several circumstances attending it, which we are not informed of. But from what is said of it, we may gather, that the tempter, who, by the consent of the Jewish and Christian church, was an evil spirit making use of the serpent as an instrument, endeavoured both to work upon the sensitive appetite, and upon that desire of knowledge and pre-eminence so natural to the human mind, and which is of great advantage when kept within proper bounds. He might probably pretend, that the tree had a hidden excellent virtue in it, of which he might plead his own experience as a proof; and that therefore they had some way misunderstood the command, or at least God would not be severe upon them if they transgressed it. If they had exercised their thinking powers, as they might and ought to have done, they might easily have seen through these specious illusions. But this they neglected, and were inexcusable in doing so; since they ought not to have hearkened to any pretences or insinuations whatsoever, against an express divine command, so plainly given, and which was particularly designed as a trial of their obedience, and was so easy to be observed. Their disobeying in such circumstances was in effect an attempt to throw off the allegiance they owed to God, an insurrection against his sovereign authority, and an arraigning his governing wisdom, and the basest ingratitude to his infinite goodness, which had placed them in such a noble and happy station, and had heaped so many favours and benefits upon them. And now they had nothing but dismal prospects before them: there was an unhappy change in the face of things: they were expelled out of paradise: the earth lost much of its beauty and fertility: and they became subject to many pains, diseases, and death. Yet God did not utterly cast them off. He gave them tokens of his readiness to receive them to his grace and

favour upon their sincere repentance: and by the original promise, the true nature and design of which was probably more distinctly explained to our first parents than is mentioned in that short account, he gave them to understand, that he would not leave them to perish without remedy under the curse and misery brought upon them by means of the tempter; and that he would raise up for them a glorious Deliverer, who was to proceed from the woman's seed, and to rescue them from the miseries and ruin to which they had exposed themselves by their sin and apostacy. And there is reason to think, that they had hopes given them, that though they were still to be subject to many evils, and to temporal death, as the effects and punishment of sin, yet upon their repentance, and sincere, though imperfect obedience, they were to be raised to a better life. And accordingly the hopes of pardoning mercy, and the expectation of a future life, seem to have obtained from the beginning, and to have spread generally among mankind, and made a part of the primitive religion derived from the first parents and ancestors of the human race.

I have laid these things together, that we may the better form a judgment concerning the Mosaic account. The sum of it is this: That man was originally created pure and upright, constituted soon after his creation in a happy paradise, and admitted to many tokens of the divine love and favour; but that he fell from that state, by sinning against God, and violating the command given him as a test of his obedience; and that he thereby brought death and misery into the world, with all the penal evils to which the human nature is now obnoxious. And these are excellent instructions. What can be more agreeable to right reason, or have a better effect, when really believed, than that God made man at first upright and happy, in a state of moral rectitude: that sin, which was owing to his wilful defection from God, was the source of all the evils to which the human nature is now exposed, and which therefore are not chargeable on God, or on his original constitution, but on man himself: that mankind are now in a lapsed state, but not forsaken of God, who hath in his great goodness provided a proper remedy, and hath been pleased to assure them of his readiness to receive them to his grace and favour, and to accept and reward their repentance and sincere obedience.

And now upon this view of things it will be no hard matter to answer the objections which Lord Bolingbroke hath urged against the Mosaic account of the fall.

He represents it as absurd to suppose, that "this moral system was destroyed by the wiles of a serpent, and by the eating of an apple, almost as soon as it began, against the intention as well as command of the Creator."* As to the command given to our first parents to abstain from the fruit of a particular tree, at the same time that they had a full grant made to them of all the other delicious fruits of paradise, it had nothing in it inconsistent with the divine goodness; and it hath been shown, that in the circumstances

* Works, vol. iii. p. 301.

man was then in, it was a command very proper to be given; and the transgressing this command, at the solicitations of any tempter whatsoever, was an inexcusable act of disobedience; that this sin was committed against the *intention as well as command of the Creator*, is very true, if by its being against his intention be understood that it was what he did not encourage or approve; though it was what he foresaw, and thought fit in his wise providence to permit. He urges indeed, that "God might have prevented man's fall by a little less indulgence to what is called free-will."* And he elsewhere mentions the "severity with which God punished our first parents, for a fault which he foreknew they would commit, when he abandoned their free-will to the temptation of committing it."† This, if it proved any thing, would prove that it is unjust in God ever to punish any man for any sin at all; for whenever men sin, it may be said that he leaves them to their own free-will, and that it is what he foreknew. No doubt God might, by an exertion of his absolute omnipotency, have hindered our first parents from sinning; and he might have hindered either men or angels from ever sinning at all. But we see, that in fact he chuses, as a moral governor, to deal with men as moral agents, and leaves them to the liberty of their own wills. And in the case here referred to, man had full power to have stood, and to have resisted the temptation; and his not so doing was his own fault, and not owing to any defect of goodness in God. He himself furnishes a proper answer to his own objection, when he observes, that "it may be truly said that God, when he gave us our reason, left us to our free-will, to make a proper or improper use of it; so that we are obliged to our Creator for a certain rule and sufficient means of arriving at happiness, and have none to blame but ourselves when we fail of it."‡ And to the same purpose he saith, that "God has given to his human creatures the materials of physical and moral happiness, and has given them faculties and powers to recollect and apply these materials. What we shall do for ourselves, he has left to the freedom of our elections."§

He urges, that "the doctrine of two independent principles, the one good, the other evil, is not so absurd as the doctrine of an inferior dependent being, who is assumed to be the author of all evil; and that to affirm, that a God sovereignly good, suffers an inferior dependent being to deface his work in any sort, and to make his other creatures both criminal and miserable, is still more injurious to the Supreme Being."|| And again he repeats it, that "it is in-

* Works, vol. iii. p. 301.

† Ibid. vol. v. p. 321.

‡ Ibid. p. 388.

§ Ibid. p. 474.

|| Ibid. vol. iv. p. 20. The scripture doctrine of evil angels, of whom Satan is represented as the head, hath been so often found fault with, that it may not be improper on this occasion to offer something for obviating the prejudices which some have conceived against the sacred writings on this account. That God made creatures of a noble order, and of sublime capacities and powers vastly superior to man, is what Lord Bolingbroke himself allows to be very probable.* And as it is reasonable to believe

* Works, vol. iv. p. 177. Vol. v. p. 329, 330.

his immense greatness, his almighty power, the infiniteness of his understanding, his omnipresence, are frequently represented and described in so admirable a manner, as shows, with the last degree of evidence, that the expressions which seem to ascribe bodily parts and members to him cannot be understood in a gross literal sense. Our author himself, ascribing motives to God, observes, that "we must speak of God after the manner of men."* And indeed we must either not speak of God at all, or we must speak of him in ways of expression, originally derived from something relating to our own bodies or minds. This writer elsewhere insinuates, that we resemble God no more in our souls than we do in our bodies; and that to say his intellect is like ours, is as bad as the anthropomorphites.† So that, according to him, expressions drawn from the faculties of the soul, are as improper as those drawn from the members of the body. Thus, under pretence of a profound veneration for the Deity, we must not speak of God at all, as some of the ancient philosophers thought it unlawful to name him, or to worship him, except in silence. Yea, we must not so much as think of him; for our ideas of God fall, no doubt, infinitely short of his real majesty and glory, as well as our expressions. But it may be observed, that this forward censurer falls into that way of talking himself which he finds fault with in the holy scriptures. He represents God as *speaking to men* by the law of nature; he calls it the *voice of God*, and the *word of God*. He speaks of the *hands of God*,‡ and of his *seeing* all things. And though he represents the ascribing ideas to God as no less improper, and even profane, than the ascribing hands and feet to him, yet on several occasions he talks of the *divine ideas*.

But he farther urges, that the scriptures attribute to God human affections and passions, and even those of the worst kind; that "they impute such things to the Divinity as would be a disgrace to humanity :"\$ That "the Jewish system contained such instances of partiality in love and hatred, of furious anger, and unrelenting vengeance, in a long series of arbitrary judgments, as no people on earth but this would have ascribed, I do not say to God, but to the worst of those monsters, who are suffered or sent by God, for a short time, to punish the iniquities of men."|| To the same purpose he afterwards observes, that according to the representations made in scripture, God "loves with partiality, his mercy is arbitrary, and depends on mere will—And towards mankind his anger is often furious, his hatred inveterate, his vengeance unrelenting; but when the wicked repent of their sins, he repents sometimes of his severity." And then he asks, "What a description is this of the All-perfect Being?" But this description is his own, and is founded on a gross misrepresentation of the true intention and design of the sacred writings. As to loving with partiality, if by that be meant his favouring and distinguishing some with greater privileges and advantages, and giving them more valuable means of improvement than others;

* Works, vol. v. p. 468. † Ibid. p. 35. ‡ Ibid. vol. iv. p. 395.
§ Ibid. vol. iii. p. 299. || Ibid. vol. v. p. 515.

His Lordship takes notice of "the severity which had been exercised on the whole race of mankind, who share in the punishment, though not in the crime."* And again he charges the divines for supposing "that all mankind were punished for the sin of one."† That mankind are now subject to the evils Moses mentions as the consequence of the fall, barrenness of the ground, pains and sickness in child-bearing, diseases and death, is undeniable. The only difference between the Mosaic account, and that of those who ridicule it, is, that they suppose all these evils to be the necessary effects of the original constitution and appointment of God, at the first formation of man and of the world; but Moses supposes the original constitution of things to have been much more happy, and that all these evils were brought into the world in consequence of man's voluntary defection from God. And which of these suppositions is most honourable to God, and most likely, if believed, to have a good effect upon the minds of men, may be left to any impartial and thinking person to determine. And it seems very odd, that it should be represented as unjust in God, to lay those evils upon men in consequence of the sin of our first parents, which they might easily have avoided, when it is accounted no reflection upon the justice and goodness of God to lay those evils upon men by the original constitution, without any regard to sin, either of their first parents, or their own.

On supposition that Adam and Eve were the fountains and protoplasts of the human race, it seems evident, that their posterity must suffer under the consequences of their defection. If they were banished from paradise, and it was just they should be so, their posterity could not expect to be continued in it. If their natures became tainted, and subject to diseases and death, they could only convey tainted and mortal natures to their offspring. It cannot be denied, that, in the course of providence, children often suffer evils that were originally owing to the crimes of their parents and ancestors. Wicked parents often by their bad conduct forfeit advantages for their children as well as themselves, and not only propagate distempered bodies to them, but, considering the great influence that the bodily crisis and temperament hath upon the dispositions of the mind, they are frequently instrumental in conveying bodily constitutions, which incline them to vicious affections and disorderly passions, though they do not bring them under an absolute necessity of sinning, or imitating their father's vices. Since it is appointed that mankind should be propagated in a way of successive generation, it is evident that children must in many cases be greatly dependent on their parents, and derive great blessings or evils from them. And this may on many accounts be supposed to hold much more strongly with respect to the first parents of the human race, than any others.

As to the exceptions our author makes against some particular expressions made use of, and circumstances related, in the Mosaic

* Works, vol. v. p. 321.

† Ibid. p. 485.—See also *ibid.* p. 284.

account of the fall, they are no other than what have been frequently repeated and answered. Dr. Tindal had urged the same objections, and several others, more distinctly, and with greater force; and I have considered them largely and particularly in my answer to that writer: to which therefore I beg leave to refer, having already insisted longer on this subject than I intended.* I would only further observe, that some remarkable traces of the primitive paradisiacal state of man, and a fall from that state, are observable in the traditions of the ancient sages, in different parts of the world. And there is great reason to think, that at the time when Moses writ, those traditions were more distinctly known. Lord Bolingbroke pronounces the account of the fall to be a *moral, philosophical, Egyptian allegory*, designed to account for the introduction of evil.† And if he had looked upon it in that light, he had no right to urge the literal sense of it as an objection against the authority of the Mosaic writings.

I proceed in the last place to consider what his Lordship has offered with regard to the sanctions of the law of Moses. He observes, that "in the twenty-eighth chapter of Deuteronomy, Moses, on the renewal of the covenant between God and the people, employs no argument to induce the latter to a strict observation of it, of an higher nature than promises of immediate good, and threatenings of immediate evil. They are exhorted to keep the law, not for the sake of the law, nor for the sake of God, but for considerations of another kind, and where not only their wants were to be supplied, but all their appetites and passions to be gratified—their avarice, all their other appetites and passions. God purchased, as it were, their obedience with this mercenary bargain."‡ That we may judge of the consistency of this writer, it is to be observed, that he himself, when speaking in high terms of the law of nature, as having sufficient proofs of a *divine sanction*, and a *divine original*, affirms the sanctions of that law to be *only temporal*, and that they are such as affect *nations collectively*, not *men individually*. And he proves these divine sanctions, as he calls them, to be sufficient, because such as these were the sanctions of the law of Moses.§ He often insists upon it, that the only sanction of the natural law appointed by divine providence is this, that national virtue shall produce national happiness, and national vice shall produce national misery. If therefore national blessings were promised in the Mosaic constitution as rewards of their obedience, and national evils and calamities denounced as the punishment of their wickedness and disobedience, there was nothing in this, according to his scheme, but what was highly proper, and perfectly agreeable to the law of nature. Yet he thinks fit to represent it as a *mercenary bargain*; as if it were wrong to annex any sanctions at all to that law; for if any were annexed, they must, upon his scheme of principles, be only of a temporal nature. As to what he observes, that "the Israelites were

* See Answer to Christianity as old as the Creation, vol. ii. chap. xiv.

† Works, vol. v. p. 350. ‡ Ibid. vol. iii. p. 291, 292. § Ibid. vol. v. p. 90, 91.

exhorted to keep the law, not for the sake of the law, nor for the sake of God, but for considerations of another kind, in which all their appetites and passions, their ambition, avarice, &c. were to be gratified," this is very unfairly represented. The blessings promised in the passage he refers to, Deut. xxviii. 1—14. are indeed chiefly of a national kind. But there is no promise made to them of extensive conquest and universal empire: and it is evident, as I have elsewhere shown,* that their constitution was not designed or fitted for it. If they obeyed the laws given them, they were to have fruitful and healthful seasons, to enjoy peace, plenty, and many blessings, in their own land. And it was promised them, that if they were invaded by their enemies, they should be protected against them, and prove victorious over them: That they should be happy and honourable above all other nations: And that God would establish them an holy people to himself, which included a promise of having their spiritual privileges continued to them, with the tokens of God's special favour and gracious presence among them, which was their happiness and their glory. Any one that impartially considers the Mosaic writings, will find, that the laws their given to the Israelites are enforced upon them by a great variety of important considerations. The excellency of the laws themselves is represented; as particularly Deut. iv. 6, 7, 8. And frequently is that short but comprehensive declaration subjoined to their laws, *I am the Lord, Jehovah*. They are urged to obedience by the consideration of God's sovereign authority and supreme dominion, of his infinite righteousness and goodness, of the great things he hath done for them, and the special relation he stood in towards them, by the gratitude they owed to him for all his benefits, by the hope of his favour, and fear of his displeasure. For they were taught that noble lesson, that in and from him alone they were to look for happiness, whether relating to the people in general, or to particular persons. And they were instructed to regard him as exercising a constant inspection over them, and taking cognizance both of their outward actions, and of the inward affections and dispositions of their hearts.

It may not be improper on this occasion to observe, that his Lordship has taken upon him to affirm, that "there cannot be any thing so impiously interested and craving, as the sentiments ascribed by Moses to the patriarchs." And he instances "in Jacob's vow, and the conditional engagement he took with God," Gen. xxviii. 20, 21, 22.† But to set this matter in a proper light, of which he has been pleased to make a most unjust representation, it must be considered, that immediately before the account which is given of Jacob's vow, we are informed of a vision he had when he was setting out upon his journey to Padan-Aram, in which God renewed the promises to him, which had been made to Abraham, concerning the giving the land of Canaan to his posterity, and that in his seed all the families of the earth should be blessed; at the same time assuring him, that

* See Answer to Morgan, vol. i. p. 134, 135. † Works, vol. iii. p. 291, 292.

he would be with him in all places whither he went, and would bring him again into that land, ver. 12—15. It was in consequence of this vision that Jacob made his vow the next morning; the design of which was to express the sense he had of the divine goodness, and his confidence in God's gracious protection; and to declare his solemn resolution, that if God would be with him, and keep him in his way, and would give him *bread to eat* and *raiment to put on* [which shows the moderation of his desires], so that he should come again to his father's house in peace, he would after his return make an open public acknowledgment of his gratitude and devotion to the Lord as his God, set apart that place where God had appeared to him to his worship, and would devote the tenth of all the substance God should give him to his service. This, instead of being *impiously interested and craving* will appear to every person that judges candidly and impartially to be a great argument of the simplicity and goodness of Jacob's heart, and of a pious and well-disposed mind; though undoubtedly it must appear absurd to our author, who does not believe that God concerneth himself with the individuals of the human race.

His Lordship frequently observes, that in the law of Moses there is no mention made of future rewards and punishments. He sometimes positively asserts, that Moses did not believe the immortality of the soul, nor the rewards and punishments of another life; for if he had, he would have taught it to that people; and that Solomon, the wisest of their kings, decides against it.* But in other passages he insinuates, that Moses might possibly believe it himself, though he did not think proper to mention it to the people; and represents it as a most surprizing thing, that "a doctrine so useful to all religions, and therefore incorporated into all the systems of Paganism, should be left wholly out of that of the Jews."† And he endeavours to draw an argument from this against the divine original of this constitution. This is what he particularly urgeth in the conclusion of the twenty-first of his Fragments and Essays in his fifth volume, where he introduces it in a very pompous manner, "as an observation, which he does not remember to have seen or heard urged on one side, or anticipated on the other, and which he thinks evidently shows how absurd as well as improper it is to ascribe these Mosaical laws to God." The observation is this: That "neither the people of Israel, nor their legislator perhaps, knew any thing of another life, wherein the crimes committed in this life are to be punished.—Although he might have learned this doctrine, which was not so much a secret doctrine, as it may be presumed the unity of the Supreme God was, among the Egyptians. Whether Moses had learned this among their schools, cannot be determined; but this may be advanced with assurance: If Moses knew that crimes, and therefore idolatry, one of the greatest, were to be punished in another life, he deceived the people, in the covenant they made by his intervention with God. If he did not know it, I say it with horror, the conse-

* Works, vol. iii. p. 290.

† Ibid. vol. v. p. 238, 239.

quence, according to the hypothesis I oppose, must be, that God deceived both him and them. In either case, a covenant or bargain was made, wherein the conditions of obedience or disobedience were not fully, nor by consequence fairly stated. The Israelites had better things to hope, and worse to fear, than those that were expressed in it. And their whole history seems to show how much need they had of these additional motives to restrain them from polytheism and idolatry, and to answer the assumed purpose of divine providence.* This is his boasted argument; and what seems mightily to recommend it to him, he looks upon it to be new, and what no man had insisted on before.

My first remark upon it is this: That he could not with any consistency urge the not making express mention of a future state, as an argument to prove, that *it is absurd and impious to ascribe the Mosical law to God*, since it appears from several parts of his book, that he himself did not believe the rewards and punishments of a future state. He ought rather, upon his hypothesis, to have conceived a high opinion of Moses's strict regard to truth, since he chose not to make use of a pious fraud, or of false and deceitful motives, when it would have been his interest, and for the advantage of his laws, to have done so. If it be said, that this is only urged as an argument *ad hominem*, which, though false and inconclusive in itself, yet is conclusive upon the hypothesis of his adversaries, and proper to distress and embarrass them, they will perhaps find it no difficult matter to defend themselves against this dilemma; for if it should be allowed, that neither Moses, nor any of the people, had any assurance of a future state, it would not follow, that God in not revealing it had deceived him or them. If indeed he had expressly told them, that the notion of a future state was false, and that they had no rewards or punishments to fear after this life is at an end, then supposing there were future rewards and punishments, this would have been a deceiving them, in the strictest, properest sense. But merely not to reveal it to them, was not to deceive them. And whereas he urges, that on that supposition there was a covenant or bargain made, in which the conditions of obedience and disobedience were not fully, nor by consequence fairly stated; this proceeds upon the supposition, that if God made a covenant with them, he would not deal fairly, if he did not lay before them all the rewards and punishments of their obedience and disobedience; which is certainly a conclusion that cannot be justified. If God had only assured them in general, that, if they kept his commandments, they should be entitled to his favour, and, if they disobeyed, they should feel the awful effects of his displeasure, this ought to have been enough to have engaged them; and it could not be said in that case that he dealt unfairly by them; especially since he might have commanded their obedience, and demanded their subjection to his laws, in a way of absolute authority, without any express stipulations on his part at all. Whatever particular promises or threatenings he added, de-

* Works, vol. v. p. 195.

pended upon his sovereign good pleasure, and he might reveal those things, in what measure or degree he in his wisdom should think fit. Our author himself has found out a reason for it, viz. that the doctrine of future rewards and punishments "was dressed up with so many fabulous circumstances among the Egyptians, that it was hard to teach or renew this doctrine in the minds of the Israelites, without giving an occasion the more to recal the polytheistical fables, and practise the idolatrous rites, they had learned during their captivity in Egypt."*

But let us put the other supposition, and which I take to be the true one, viz. that Moses and the Israelites did believe a future state of rewards and punishments. This writer himself frequently intimates, that it was believed among the Egyptians, and that it was not a part of the secret doctrine, confined only to a few, but was spread and propagated among the vulgar. It is therefore reasonable to believe, that this doctrine obtained among the Israelites too, especially as, by his own acknowledgment, it obtained among the Babylonians, and indeed among all the ancient nations, as far as we have any accounts left us of their sentiments. And it cannot with the least probability be supposed, that the Israelites were the only people that were ignorant of it, and had no notions of that kind among them at all; except we imagine that they were taught to believe the contrary; of which there is not the least proof: nor is there any thing in the writings of Moses to contradict that notion. On the contrary, there are several in those writings which by a fair construction imply it. Our author seems to think, that the Mosaical account of the formation of man implies that his soul was a particle of the divinity.† There is no reason to suppose this. But it certainly leads us to acknowledge a remarkable distinction of the soul from the body; that it is a nobler substance, more nearly resembling the divinity, and not, like the body, formed of the dust of the ground. What Moses saith of God's gracious acceptance of Abel's sacrifice, who yet was murdered, and met with no reward of his piety, no good effects of God's acceptance of him, except we take in the consideration of a future state: The account he gives of the translation of Enoch, that he *walked with God*, and that *he was not, for God took him*, which, in the most natural construction, implies the taking him out of this world to a better state: His representing the patriarchs, as calling this their present life the *few and evil days of their pilgrimage*, which showed they *looked for a better country, that is, an heavenly*: To which may be added, the accounts there given of the appearances of angels, which naturally led the Israelites to acknowledge an invisible world of spirits: nor can any instance be brought of any nation, who believed the existence of angels and separate intelligences, and yet did not believe the immortality of the soul, and a future state: The express declarations of Solomon, that *the righteous hath hope in his death*; the clear distinction he makes between the soul and body, that at death the latter shall *return to*

* Works, vol. v. p. 240. 241.

† Ibid. vol. iv. p. 482.

the earth as it was, and the former, *the spirit shall return to God that gave it*; and that there shall be a future account, in which *every work shall be brought into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good or whether it be evil*: The assumption of Elias into heaven, which naturally led the thoughts of all that heard of it to another world, where good men shall be eminently rewarded: All these things, not to mention several passages in the Psalms and in the Prophets which plainly look this way, convince me, that a future state was all along believed among the people.* And indeed it does not appear, that, at the time of Moses, any man had arisen, as there did in the latter ages, who, through the vain deceit and false refinements of philosophy, denied it. As to the promises and threatenings addressed to the people of Israel as a collective body, of which kind those seem to be which are mentioned, Lev. xxvi. and Deut. xxviii. these no doubt were directly and immediately of a temporal nature; and the striking representations that are there made of the consequences of their obedience or disobedience in this present world, seem very well fitted to make strong and vigorous impressions upon them, and to give them a lively sense of the constant interposition of divine providence. But besides this, the tenor of their law led them to think that the happiness of every individual person among them, and his interest in the favour of God, depended upon his obedience to the divine commands, and the practice of righteousness. This especially seems to have been the design of that general declaration in the law, that the man that did the precepts there enjoined should *live* by them. And there is no reason to think that they looked upon this as wholly confined to this present world. That it was understood to have a more extensive view, may be reasonably concluded from what is said in the eighteenth chapter of Ezekiel, where the equity of the divine proceedings is vindicated, and where it is expressly declared, with the greatest solemnity, concerning every particular person that should forsake his evil ways, and turn to the practice of righteousness, that he should *not die*, but should surely *live*, *i. e.* be happy; and concerning every wicked and impenitent sinner, that he should surely die, *i. e.* be miserable; which must have its principal effect in a future state of rewards and punishments; since even under that constitution it often happened, that particular good men were exposed to many outward evils and calamities, and that bad men had great outward prosperity. What made it more necessary to insist explicitly and fully upon the doctrine of a future state in the gospel, was, that through the corruption of mankind the ancient belief of the immortality of the soul and a future state was very much obscured and defaced. As to the heathens, there were many among those who made great pretensions to learning and philosophy that absolutely rejected it, and most of those who did not positively reject it, yet treated it as a thing doubtful and uncertain. And it had been so much blended with fables, that at last it seemed to have little hold even on vulgar opinion;

* See this more fully proved in the Answer to Dr. Morgan, vol. i. p. 339, et seq.

as his Lordship observes, in a passage cited above. To which it may be added, that there was at that time a considerable party even among the Jews themselves, considerable for their power and quality, though not for their numbers, who denied it. On all these accounts, it became the divine wisdom to interpose by a more express revelation, containing clearer discoveries, and fuller proofs of it, than had been ever given to mankind before. And this revelation was very properly brought by the most illustrious messenger that could be sent from heaven, the Son of God himself, that glorious and divine person whose coming had been so long promised and foretold. To which it may be added, that as the gospel did not contain a system of laws immediately addressed to any particular nation, as the Mosaic was, so none of the promises or threatenings there delivered relate directly and immediately to national blessings or calamities, but are such in which every individual of the human race should look upon himself as nearly interested.

Thus I have considered the principal objections advanced by Lord Bolingbroke against the holy scriptures of the Old Testament, and especially against the Mosaic writings. There are some other objections interspersed, and which he rather briefly hints at than pursues, and which scarce deserve a distinct consideration. He thinks that a divine law ought always to have the effect. "Human laws may be eluded, and miss of the effect. But if God gives a law, it may be presumed, that effectual care should be taken to make that law observed; whereas there never was a law that less had the designed effect than that of Moses, from which the people were continually revolting."* This argument would hold equally against the law of nature, which he himself affirms to be the law of God, and yet owns that men have revolted from it in all ages. But it has been shown, that the law of Moses had actually a great effect, and that by virtue of it the worship of the one true God was maintained among the Jews, in a manner which eminently distinguished them above the heathen nations: and that polity was surprizingly preserved in all the revolutions of their state till the coming of our Saviour, for which it remarkably prepared the way, and thus answered the ends the divine wisdom had in view in instituting it.

He seems to blame Moses for not having taken the proper measures to make his laws observed, as Ezra and Nehemiah did afterwards. But if the directions which Moses gave had been pursued, never were there better and wiser precautions taken to engage the people to make themselves acquainted with their law, and oblige them to a careful observation of it. And all that Ezra and Nehemiah did was to bring things back as near as possible to the original institution and design. The signal calamities inflicted upon the Jews in the time of the Babylonish captivity, the greatest that had ever befallen them, the utter desolation of their country, and their having been so long banished from it, which calamities had been originally threatened in the law itself, and were regarded by them

* Works, vol. iii. p. 393.

as signal punishments from heaven for their violation of it; this, together with their wonderful restoration at the time that had been fixed for it by the prophets, awakened in them a zeal against idolatry, and an attachment to their law, greater than ever they had shown before.

He urges farther, that "a divine law should have such a clearness and precision in its terms, that it may not be in the power of persons to elude and perplex the meaning of it. And that if it be not so, all that is said about marks of divinity in any law that pretends to be revealed by God is mere cant." * This is particularly intended against the law of Moses. And yet certain it is, that if the people frequently fell off into idolatrous practices, and perhaps endeavoured to reconcile these their practices with the worship of God as there prescribed, this could not be justly charged upon any want of precision in the terms of the law. For what can be clearer and more precise than the commands there given against polytheism and idolatry? Nothing can be more unreasonable, than what he sometimes insinuates, that if a revelation be given at all, it must be such as it should not be in the power of man to misapprehend or misrepresent. † It may be of signal use to persons of honest and candid minds, though it be not absolutely incapable of being perverted and abused; which it could not be, if delivered in human language; except God should, by an omnipotent energy, and by a constant miracle, overrule all the passions, inclinations, and prejudices of the human nature; the absurdity of which supposition, though it be what this writer seems sometimes to insist upon, I need not take means to expose.

He thinks, "the scriptures ought to be more perfect, according to our ideas of human perfection, whether we consider them as books of law or of history, than any other books that are avowedly human." ‡ I suppose he means that there should be greater elegance of composition, beauty of language, exactness of method, or that they should be more strictly philosophical. But perhaps what seems elegant to one nation would not appear so to another. The notions of elegance in style and composition were different among the Greeks and Romans, from what they were in the Eastern nations. And what might render the scriptures more perfect in the eyes of some persons, might render them less perfect in other respects, and less fitted to answer the end for which they were designed. To talk of elegance of composition in human laws, or to blame acts of parliament for not being oratorical, would be thought a very odd objection. But it is the great excellency of the sacred writings, that there is in the different parts of scripture what may please persons of all tastes. There is a simplicity and plainness accommodated to the vulgar; and yet there is in many passages a sublimity and majesty not to be equalled, and which has gained the admiration of the ablest judges.

As to what he sometimes mentions concerning the multiplicity of

* Works, vol. iii. p. 292, 293, 296.

† Ibid. vol. v. p. 515. vol. iv. p. 261, 267.

‡ Ibid. vol. iii. p. 290.

consistent with the goodness and wisdom of God, to suffer an inferior being, his creature, and a creature in actual rebellion, to baffle his designs."* And if he suffered this evil being to compel them to be criminal and miserable, it would be so; but not, if he suffered him only to tempt and to seduce, and at the same time made them every way able to withstand the temptation, and provided them with sufficient means to that purpose; which was the case of our first parents. God had done all that was proper for him to do as a moral governor, to prevent the defection. He had formed them in a state of moral rectitude, and endued them with good dispositions. The creation was fresh about them, and the glorious evidences of the divine wisdom, power, and goodness! They knew that he was the Author of their beings, and that from him flowed all the blessings they enjoyed. He had given them the most express injunction in the plainest terms, and strongly enforced, to prevent their disobedience. I see not therefore why God should exert his own omnipotency to hinder Satan from tempting them, since he could only tempt but not compel; and they were sufficiently armed and provided against every temptation that could befall them, if they would but use the strength and advantages they had; which, all things considered, were superior to those that any of their posterity have been since possessed of.

that they were made free agents, why may it not be supposed that some of them made a wrong use of their liberty, and became depraved and corrupt? And if one of them, of distinguished power and dignity above the rest, by a perversion of his great abilities, became eminent in evil and wickedness, and particularly instrumental to draw others to sin and disobedience, it cannot be pretended that this supposition carrieth any absurdity in it. And in such a case it might be expected, that he and his associates would prove enemies to all goodness and virtue, and that having fallen from their own felicity and glory, they would envy the happiness of others, and endeavour to draw them into guilt and misery. This is what we often see bad men do, who are arrived to a great degree of corruption and depravity. His Lordship indeed pretendeth, that the supposition of an *inferior dependent being who is assumed to be the author of all evil*, is more absurd than the doctrine of *two independent principles, the one good, the other evil*. If by being the *author of all evil*, be understood that there is any one inferior dependent being, who is the sole universal cause of all evil, and that there is no evil but what he is the author of, it is wrong to charge the scriptures or christian divines with assuming it; but to pass by this misrepresentation, it is evident to the common sense of mankind, that there is a vast difference between the supposition of an Almighty and independent evil being, a supposition full of absurdity and horror, and that of an inferior dependent being, who was made originally pure and upright, but fell by his own voluntary defection into vice and wickedness, and who, though permitted in many instances to do mischief, and to act according to his evil inclinations, as wicked men are often permitted to do in this present state, yet is still under the sovereign controul of the most holy, wise, and powerful governor of the world. For in this case we may be sure, from the divine wisdom, justice and goodness, that God will in the fittest season inflict a punishment upon that evil being, and his associates, proportionable to their crimes; and that in the mean time he setteth bounds to their malice and rage, and provideth sufficient assistance for those whom they endeavour to seduce to evil, whereby they may be enabled to repel their temptations, if it be not their own faults; and that he will in his superior wisdom bring good out of their evil, and overrule even their malice and wickedness, for promoting the great ends of his government. This is the representation made to us of this matter in the Holy Scripture; nor is there any thing in this that can be proved to be contrary to sound reason. And we may justly conclude, that in the final issue of things, the wisdom, as well as righteousness, of this part of the divine administration, will most illustriously appear.

* Works, vol. v. p. 321.

His Lordship takes notice of "the severity which had been exercised on the whole race of mankind, who share in the punishment, though not in the crime."* And again he charges the divines for supposing "that all mankind were punished for the sin of one."† That mankind are now subject to the evils Moses mentions as the consequence of the fall, barrenness of the ground, pains and sickness in child-bearing, diseases and death, is undeniable. The only difference between the Mosaic account, and that of those who ridicule it, is, that they suppose all these evils to be the necessary effects of the original constitution and appointment of God, at the first formation of man and of the world; but Moses supposes the original constitution of things to have been much more happy, and that all these evils were brought into the world in consequence of man's voluntary defection from God. And which of these suppositions is most honourable to God, and most likely, if believed, to have a good effect upon the minds of men, may be left to any impartial and thinking person to determine. And it seems very odd, that it should be represented as unjust in God, to lay those evils upon men in consequence of the sin of our first parents, which they might easily have avoided, when it is accounted no reflection upon the justice and goodness of God to lay those evils upon men by the original constitution, without any regard to sin, either of their first parents, or their own.

On supposition that Adam and Eve were the fountains and protoplasts of the human race, it seems evident, that their posterity must suffer under the consequences of their defection. If they were banished from paradise, and it was just they should be so, their posterity could not expect to be continued in it. If their natures became tainted, and subject to diseases and death, they could only convey tainted and mortal natures to their offspring. It cannot be denied, that, in the course of providence, children often suffer evils that were originally owing to the crimes of their parents and ancestors. Wicked parents often by their bad conduct forfeit advantages for their children as well as themselves, and not only propagate distempered bodies to them, but, considering the great influence that the bodily crisis and temperament hath upon the dispositions of the mind, they are frequently instrumental in conveying bodily constitutions, which incline them to vicious affections and disorderly passions, though they do not bring them under an absolute necessity of sinning, or imitating their father's vices. Since it is appointed that mankind should be propagated in a way of successive generation, it is evident that children must in many cases be greatly dependent on their parents, and derive great blessings or evils from them. And this may on many accounts be supposed to hold much more strongly with respect to the first parents of the human race, than any others.

As to the exceptions our author makes against some particular expressions made use of, and circumstances related, in the Mosaic

* Works, vol. v. p. 321.

† Ibid. p. 485.—See also *ibid.* p. 284.

them by asserting the divine mission of the Publisher, who proved his assertions at the same time by his miracles; and it enforces the whole law of faith by promising rewards, and threatening punishments, which he declares he will distribute when he comes to judge the world.* And he afterwards repeats it, that "Christianity, as it stands in the gospel, contains not only a complete but a very plain system of religion. It is in truth the system of natural religion, and such it might have continued, to the unspeakable advantage of mankind, if it had been propagated with the same simplicity with which it was originally taught by Christ himself."† He says, that "supposing Christianity to have been a human invention, it had been the most amiable and the most useful invention that was ever imposed on mankind for their good: And that Christianity, as it came out of the hands of God, if I may use the expression, was a most simple and intelligible rule of belief, worship, and manners, which is the true notion of a religion. As soon as men presumed to add any thing of their own to it, the human alloy corrupted the divine mass, and it became an object of vain, intricate, and contentious science."‡ After having observed, that "the political views of Constantine, in the establishment of Christianity, were to attach the subjects of the empire more firmly to himself and his successors, and the several nations which composed it to one another, by the bonds of a religion common to all of them; to soften the ferocity of the armies; to reform the licentiousness of the provinces; and by infusing a spirit of moderation, and submission to government, to extinguish those principles of avarice and ambition, of injustice and violence, by which so many factions were formed, and the peace of the empire so often and so fatally broken;" he declares, that "no religion was ever so well proportioned, nor so well directed, as that of Christianity seemed to be, to all these purposes." He adds, that "it had no tendency to inspire that love of the country,§ nor that zeal for the glory and grandeur of it, which glowed in the heart of every Roman citizen in the time of the commonwealth; but it recommended what Constantine liked better, benevolence, patience, humility, and all the softer virtues."|| He alloweth, that "the gospel is in all cases one continued lesson of the strictest morality, of justice, of benevolence, and of universal charity." He mentions "Christ's blaming his disciples for been willing to call for fire from heaven against the Samaritans: And that the miracles wrought by him, in the mild and beneficent spirit of Christianity, tended to the good of mankind."¶ He observes, that "the theology contained in the gospel lies in a narrow compass. It is marvellous indeed, but it is plain, and it is employed throughout to enforce natural religion."** After having said, that "the articles of faith have furnished matter of contention in, as well as from the apostolical age, and have added a motive to

* Works, vol. iv. p. 314.

† Ibid. p. 316.

‡ Ibid. p. 394, 395.

§ That Christianity tends to produce and promote a true love to our country, in that sense in which it is properly a virtue, see above, vol. i. p. 59, 60, marg. note.

|| Works, vol. iv. p. 433.

¶ Ibid. p. 188, 189.

** Ibid. p. 261.

that cruel principle, which was never known till Christians introduced it into the world, to persecution even for opinions;" he adds, that "the charge which the enemies of religion bring against Christianity on this account is unjustly brought. These effects have not been caused by the Gospel, but by the system raised upon it; not by the revelations of God, but by the inventions of men."* He professes a great concern for true Christianity in opposition to theology, and says, that "genuine Christianity was taught of God."† And not to multiply passages for this purpose, he pronounces, that "the Christian system of faith and practice was revealed by God himself, and it is absurd and impious to assert, that the divine *Logos* revealed it incompletely or imperfectly. Its simplicity and plainness showed, that it was designed to be the religion of mankind, and manifested likewise the divinity of its original."‡

I have chosen to lay together these several passages relating to Christianity in one view. And if we were to look no farther, we should certainly entertain a very favourable opinion of Lord Bolingbroke's sentiments with regard to the truth, the excellency, and divine original, of the gospel of Jesus.

I shall here subjoin some reflections which have occurred to me in reviewing these passages, and others of the like import, which are to be found in his Lordship's writings.

The first reflection is this: That there must certainly be a wonderful beauty and excellency in the religion of Jesus, considered in its original purity and simplicity, which could force such acknowledgments from a person so strongly prejudiced against it, as his Lordship appears to have been. According to the representation he himself has been pleased to make of it, it was a *most amiable and most useful* institution, whose natural tendency was directed to *promote the peace and happiness of mankind*. It contains *all the duties of natural religion*, and teaches them in the *most plain and simple manner*. It is one continued lesson of the strictest morality, of justice, of benevolence, and of universal charity: and tends to extinguish those principles of avarice and ambition, of injustice and violence, which have done so much mischief in the world, and disturbed the peace and order of society. As its moral precepts are excellent, so its positive institutions are not only innocent but profitable, and extremely proper to keep up the spirit of religion. He acknowledges, that, considered in its original simplicity, it was a *most simple and intelligible rule of belief, worship, and practice*; that the *theology contained in the Gospel is marvellous, but plain*; and that the *system of religion there taught is a complete system, to all the purposes of religion natural and revealed*, and might have continued so, to the *unspeakable advantage of mankind, if it had been propagated with the same simplicity with which it was taught by Christ himself*. I think it plainly follows from this representation of the nature and tendency of the Christian religion as taught by our Saviour and his apostles, that those can in no sense be regarded as real friends to mankind,

* Works, vol. iv. 313. † Ibid, p. 340.—See also vol. iii. p. 329. ‡ Ibid. p. 451.

who do what they can to subvert its authority, and thereby destroy its influence on the minds of men, and who by artful insinuations, or even open attempts, endeavour to bring true original Christianity into contempt; as it will appear this writer, notwithstanding all his fair professions, hath done.

Another reflection that may be made on Lord Bolingbroke's concessions is this: that he has in effect given up several objections which have been urged by the deistical writers, and on which great stress has been laid, and has acknowledged them to be of no force against the religion of Jesus as laid down in the gospel. It has been pretended, that Christianity, or revealed religion, is not friendly to civil sovereignty or government; but he treats those that make this objection, if designed against Christianity as revealed in the Gospel, and not merely against the duties that have been superadded to it, as *falling below notice*, and *scarce deserving an answer*;* and praises the policy of Constantine in endeavouring to establish Christianity as the religion of the empire, as being the best fitted of all religions to promote the public peace and order, to reform licentiousness, to curb factions, and to infuse a spirit of moderation, and submission to government. See the passages cited above from vol. iv. p. 282. 433.

Again, Christianity, or revealed religion, hath been often objected against on account of its positive precepts, or institutions, added to the law of nature. But his Lordship thinks "it may be admitted, that things entirely and exactly consistent with the law of our nature may be superadded to it by the same divine authority, and that positive precepts may be given about things which are indifferent by the law of our nature, and which become obligatory as soon as they are enjoined by such positive precepts."† And particularly with regard to the positive institutions of Christianity, or the Christian sacraments, as enjoined in the gospel, in their primitive simplicity, he acknowledges, in a passage above produced, that they were extremely proper to keep up the spirit of true religion, and to promote the observation of moral duties.‡

Another objection which hath been urged against Christianity, is drawn from that spirit of persecution which hath obtained amongst Christians on account of opinions in religion. But he saith, that "the charge which the enemies of Christianity bring against it on this account is unjustly brought; that these effects have not been caused by the gospel, but by the system raised upon it; not by the revelations of God, but by the inventions of men." And he mentions Christ's blaming his disciples for being willing to call for fire from heaven upon the Samaritans; and that all he instructed his apostles to do, even in cases of the most enormous crimes, was to separate sinners from the communion of the faithful.§

There is no objection which hath been more frequently urged

* Works, vol. iv. p. 300, 301.

† Ibid. vol. v. p. 547.

‡ Ibid. vol. iv. p. 301.—See also *ibid.* p. 310, 311. 501.

§ Ibid. vol. iv. p. 188, 189. 313.

against the Christian religion, than its teaching doctrines or articles of belief that *reason neither could discover, nor can comprehend*. He asserts that there are articles or doctrines of this kind in the gospel, but that they are *concisely and plainly enough expressed in the original gospel properly so called, which Christ taught, and which his four Evangelists recorded*; though they have been since *corrupted by theology*.^{*} And speaking of "reasonable men who have received the Christian revelation for genuine, after a sufficient examination of the external and internal proofs," he says, "such men having found nothing that makes it inconsistent with itself, nor that is repugnant to any of the divine truths which reason and the works of God demonstrate to them, will never set up reason in contradiction to it, on account of things plainly taught, but incomprehensible as to their manner of being. If they did, their reason would be false and deceitful; they would cease to be reasonable men."[†] It is true that he elsewhere saith, that "if the things contained in any revelation be above reason, that is, incomprehensible, I do not say in their manner of being, for that alone would not make them liable to objection, but in themselves, and according to the terms in which they are communicated, there is no criterion left by which to judge whether they are agreeable or repugnant to the religion of nature and of reason. They are not therefore to be received."[‡] But it is to be considered, that when divines talk of things above reason in the Christian system, all that they mean by it is, that they are things not contrary to reason, but as to the manner of them inconceivable, and according to his own concession, it can be no objection against the truth or divinity of revelation, that it containeth an account of some things which are *incomprehensible in their manner of being*.

Another reflection that is proper to be made upon what Lord Bolingbroke hath acknowledged with regard to the original Christian revelation as laid down in the gospel of Jesus, is, that he hath on several occasions seemed expressly and formally to own its divine original. In some of the passages above cited, he directly declares, that *genuine Christianity was taught by God*. That the *Christian system of faith and practice was revealed by God himself*. And that *the first publisher of Christianity proved his assertions by his miracles*. To which I shall add another remarkable passage in the conclusion of this fourth Essay, which is *concerning authority in matters of religion*. "Christianity," saith he, "genuine Christianity, is contained in the gospel; it is the word of God. It requires, therefore, our veneration and strict conformity to it."[§] He ought, therefore, if he were consistent with himself, on the authority of that revelation, to receive what is there plainly revealed concerning the moral attributes of God, concerning divine providence as extending to the individuals of the human race, con-

^{*} Works, vol. iv. p. 294. [†] Ibid. p. 384.—See also p. 279.

[‡] Ibid. vol. v. p. 546.

[§] Ibid. vol. iv. p. 631, 632.—See also *ibid.* p. 279. and vol. iii. p. 339.

pended upon his sovereign good pleasure, and he might reveal those things, in what measure or degree he in his wisdom should think fit. Our author himself has found out a reason for it, viz. that the doctrine of future rewards and punishments "was dressed up with so many fabulous circumstances among the Egyptians, that it was hard to teach or renew this doctrine in the minds of the Israelites, without giving an occasion the more to recal the polytheistical fables, and practise the idolatrous rites, they had learned during their captivity in Egypt."*

But let us put the other supposition, and which I take to be the true one, viz. that Moses and the Israelites did believe a future state of rewards and punishments. This writer himself frequently intimates, that it was believed among the Egyptians, and that it was not a part of the secret doctrine, confined only to a few, but was spread and propagated among the vulgar. It is therefore reasonable to believe, that this doctrine obtained among the Israelites too, especially as, by his own acknowledgment, it obtained among the Babylonians, and indeed among all the ancient nations, as far as we have any accounts left us of their sentiments. And it cannot with the least probability be supposed, that the Israelites were the only people that were ignorant of it, and had no notions of that kind among them at all; except we imagine that they were taught to believe the contrary; of which there is not the least proof: nor is there any thing in the writings of Moses to contradict that notion. On the contrary, there are several in those writings which by a fair construction imply it. Our author seems to think, that the Mosaical account of the formation of man implies that his soul was a particle of the divinity.† There is no reason to suppose this. But it certainly leads us to acknowledge a remarkable distinction of the soul from the body; that it is a nobler substance, more nearly resembling the divinity, and not, like the body, formed of the dust of the ground. What Moses saith of God's gracious acceptance of Abel's sacrifice, who yet was murdered, and met with no reward of his piety, no good effects of God's acceptance of him, except we take in the consideration of a future state: The account he gives of the translation of Enoch, that he *walked with God*, and that *he was not, for God took him*, which, in the most natural construction, implies the taking him out of this world to a better state: His representing the patriarchs, as calling this their present life the *few and evils days of their pilgrimage*, which showed they *looked for a better country, that is, an heavenly*: To which may be added, the accounts there given of the appearances of angels, which naturally led the Israelites to acknowledge an invisible world of spirits: nor can any instance be brought of any nation, who believed the existence of angels and separate intelligences, and yet did not believe the immortality of the soul, and a future state: The express declarations of Solomon, that the *righteous hath hope in his death*; the clear distinction he makes between the soul and body, that at death the latter shall *return to*

* Works, vol. v. p. 240, 241.

† Ibid. vol. iv. p. 483.

the earth as it was, and the former, *the spirit shall return to God that gave it*; and that there shall be a future account, in which *every work shall be brought into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good or whether it be evil*: The assumption of Elias into heaven, which naturally led the thoughts of all that heard of it to another world, where good men shall be eminently rewarded: All these things, not to mention several passages in the Psalms and in the Prophets which plainly look this way, convince me, that a future state was all along believed among the people.* And indeed it does not appear, that, at the time of Moses, any man had arisen, as there did in the latter ages, who, through the vain deceit and false refinements of philosophy, denied it. As to the promises and threatenings addressed to the people of Israel as a collective body, of which kind those seem to be which are mentioned, Lev. xxvi. and Deut. xxviii. these no doubt were directly and immediately of a temporal nature; and the striking representations that are there made of the consequences of their obedience or disobedience in this present world, seem very well fitted to make strong and vigorous impressions upon them, and to give them a lively sense of the constant interposition of divine providence. But besides this, the tenor of their law led them to think that the happiness of every individual person among them, and his interest in the favour of God, depended upon his obedience to the divine commands, and the practice of righteousness. This especially seems to have been the design of that general declaration in the law, that the man that did the precepts there enjoined should *live* by them. And there is no reason to think that they looked upon this as wholly confined to this present world. That it was understood to have a more extensive view, may be reasonably concluded from what is said in the eighteenth chapter of Ezekiel, where the equity of the divine proceedings is vindicated, and where it is expressly declared, with the greatest solemnity, concerning every particular person that should forsake his evil ways, and turn to the practice of righteousness, that he should *not die*, but should surely *live*, *i. e.* be happy; and concerning every wicked and impenitent sinner, that he should surely die, *i. e.* be miserable; which must have its principal effect in a future state of rewards and punishments; since even under that constitution it often happened, that particular good men were exposed to many outward evils and calamities, and that bad men had great outward prosperity. What made it more necessary to insist explicitly and fully upon the doctrine of a future state in the gospel, was, that through the corruption of mankind the ancient belief of the immortality of the soul and a future state was very much obscured and defaced. As to the heathens, there were many among those who made great pretensions to learning and philosophy that absolutely rejected it, and most of those who did not positively reject it, yet treated it as a thing doubtful and uncertain. And it had been so much blended with fables, that at last it seemed to have little hold even on vulgar opinion;

* See this more fully proved in the Answer to Dr. Morgan, vol. i. p. 339, et seq.

too ; and they will ask with a sneer, whether a man, whose passion for courtezans and handsome boys inspired him to write so many lewd verses, was likely to be inspired by the Holy Ghost ?”* This is mean banter, taking advantage of the too great admiration some particular persons have expressed for Plato. But he has not traced the conformity between Platonism and genuine original Christianity, under pretence that it was needless. He owns, that Plato *blundered on some divine truths* :† That on some occasions he wrote *like a very pious and rational theist and moralist* ; and that *very elevated sentiments may be collected from his writings* : That there is in them *a mixture of the brightest truths, and the foulest errors*.‡ It is not to be wondered at therefore, that there was in several instances, a conformity between the doctrine of Plato, and that of the gospel. But he himself acknowledges, that there were many things in his scheme contrary to that of Christianity. He says, that “some of Plato’s writings abound in notions that are agreeable to the “Christian system, and in others that are repugnant to it.”§ That “far from going about to destroy the pagan superstition, he refined it, and made it more plausible, and more secure from the attacks to which it was exposed before.”|| And that, accordingly, “Platonism answered the purposes of those who opposed Christianity.”¶ I would only farther observe, that there is no writer whom he represents as so unintelligible as Plato ; and yet he intimates, that if he had known and taught the peculiar doctrines of the gospel, “he, who is so often unintelligible now would have been vastly more so, and less fitted for the great work of reforming mankind.”*** This is a very odd insinuation from one who has acknowledged, that true original Christianity is a *plain and intelligible system of belief and practice* : and that its *simplicity and plainness shewed, that it was designed to be the religion of mankind, and manifested likewise the divinity of its original*.

It may be looked upon as a farther proof of his regard to Christianity, that he represents it as an inconsistent scheme. He pretends, that the New Testament consisteth of two gospels, the one published by our Saviour himself, and recorded by the evangelists, and the other by St. Paul.

He observes, that “Christ was to outward appearance a Jew, and ordered his disciples to do what the scribes and pharisees who sat in Moses’s chair taught : and that when he commissioned his apostles to teach and baptize all nations, he only meant it of the Jews dispersed into all nations.” He asserts, that, “the mystery of God’s taking the Gentiles to be his people without subjecting them to circumcision, or the law of Moses, was inconsistent with the declarations and practice of Jesus.”†† He asks therefore, “if this was the purpose of God, to take the Gentiles to be his people under the Messiah, how came it that the Messiah himself gave no instructions about it to his apostles, when he sent them to preach

* Works, vol. iv. p. 340. † Ibid. p. 348. ‡ Ibid. p. 345. 352. § Ibid. p. 344. 345 Ibid. p. 355. ¶ Ibid. p. 359. ** Ibid. vol. v. p. 226. †† Ibid. vol. iv. p. 300

his gospel to all nations? Why was the revelation of this important mystery, so necessary at the first publication of the gospel, reserved for St. Paul, who had been a persecutor? Shall we say, that this eternal purpose of the Father was unknown to the Son? Or, that if it was known to him, he neglected to communicate it to the first preachers of the gospel?" He seems to think these questions unanswerable, and that "the *pertness* and *impudence* of the men that pretend to account for these things *deserve no regard*."* And yet it is no hard matter to solve these difficulties. The calling of the Gentiles was originally included in our Saviour's scheme. It was a remarkable part of the character of the Messiah, clearly pointed out in the prophetical writings, by many express predictions. Our Lord himself, during his own personal ministry, gave plain intimations of his design that way, and after his ascension into heaven instructed his apostles in it by his Spirit, whom he sent to guide them into all truth. And the gradual discovery of this, in a way fitted to remove their prejudices, was conducted with admirable wisdom as well as condescension.

Mr. Chubb had insisted on this objection at great length; and I shall therefore refer to the remarks made upon that writer in the fourteenth Letter: yet, upon no better foundation than this, his Lordship hath taken upon him to affirm, that the "gospel St. Paul preached was contradictory to that of Jesus Christ:" and that "he taught several doctrines, which were directly repugnant to the word and example of the Messiah."† And indeed our author hath on many occasions discovered a particular prejudice against that great apostle. He calls him a *true cabbalistical architect*,‡ a loose paraphraser and *cabbalistical commentator*, as much at least as any *ancient or modern rabbi*: and that the different manner of his preaching the gospel, and that of the other apostles, "marks strongly the different schools in which they had been educated, the school of Christ, and the school of Gamaliel."§ But nothing is more evident to every one that reads the New Testament with attention, than that there is a perfect harmony between St. Paul and the other apostles: and that the scheme of religion taught in the gospels and in the epistles is every-where the same. Such a harmony there is, as shows they were all directed by the same spirit. The gospel which St. Paul preached was what he received by revelation from Jesus Christ, as he himself declares, Gal. i. 12. He had not learned it in the school of Gamaliel. On the contrary, in that school he had imbibed the strongest prejudices against the religion of Jesus, and which nothing less than a power of evidence, which he was not able to resist, could overcome. He was very well versed in the Jewish learning; yet none of the apostles so frequently warned the Christian converts against the Jewish fables, or speaks with such contempt of their vain traditions, their endless genealogies, their strifes and questions about words, as he has done.

There are several invidious charges brought by our author against

* Works, vol. iv. p. 326.

† Ibid. p. 326.

‡ Ibid. vol. iii. p. 288.

§ Ibid. p. 327, 328.

this excellent person. He is pleased to represent him as a *loose declaimer*, as a *vain-glorious boaster*, as having been guilty of *great hypocrisy and dissimulation* in his conduct towards the Jewish Christians, as writing *obscurely and unintelligibly*, and that where he is *intelligible*, he is *absurd, profane, and trifling*.^{*} He particularly instances in his doctrine concerning *predestination*;[†] though he owns, that "this doctrine is very much softened, and the assumed proceedings of God towards men are brought almost within the bounds of credibility, by Mr. Locke's exposition of the ninth chapter of the epistle to the Romans," which he calls a *forced one*, but offers nothing to prove it so; and acknowledges, that *this sense might be admitted*.[‡] He also charges him with teaching passive obedience, and as *employing religion to support good and bad governments alike*;[§] though any one that impartially considers the apostle's doctrine in the passage he refers to, *viz.* the thirteenth chapter of the Epistle to the Romans, will find it wise and excellent: Mr. Chubb had advanced the same charge, as well as most of the others that are produced by Lord Bolingbroke against that eminent apostle: and that I may not be guilty of needless repetitions, I shall refer to the remarks made on that writer in the fourteenth Letter.

His Lordship mentions that passage, 1 Cor. xi. 5. 14. about women's prophesying with their heads uncovered, and that it is a shameful thing for men to wear long hair, which he says, is the *most intelligible trifling that we find in the gospel*. This is very improperly brought in by the author here, where he proposes to show that where St. Paul is not obscure he is *profane and trifling*; for this is generally acknowledged to be one of the obscurest passages in St. Paul's Epistles. But this is no real objection against their authority. Some obscure and difficult passages must be expected in the most excellent of ancient writings, especially in things that have a special reference to the customs and usages of those times. He is pleased to say, that the *argument may not appear very conclusive, nor indeed very intelligible to us*: and if so, he has done wrong to produce it as an instance of *intelligible trifling*: but he sneeringly adds, that *it was both*, he doubts not, to the *Corinthians*. And I doubt not they understood it better than we at this distance can pretend to. He then mentions the apostle's directions to the Corinthians with regard to the prudent and orderly exercise of those spiritual gifts: and these directions cannot reasonably be turned to the disadvantage of the apostle, since they are undeniably wise and excellent.

Among other charges which Lord Bolingbroke bringeth against St. Paul, one is that of madness. He asks, "Can he be less than mad, who boast a revelation superadded to reason to supply the defects of it, and who superadds reason to revelation to supply the defects of this too at the same time? This is madness, or there is no such thing incident to our nature." And he mentions several

^{*} Works, vol. iii. p. 328. 330, 331.

[†] Ibid. p. 331. 509. vol. v. p. 567.

[‡] Ibid. p. 456.

[§] Ibid. vol. iv. p. 509. 516.

persons of great name as having been guilty of this madness, and particularly St. Paul.* That reason and revelation are in their several ways necessary, and assistant to each other, is easily conceivable, and so far from being an absurdity, that it is a certain truth. But the stress of his Lordship's observation lies wholly in the turn of the expression, and in the improper way of putting the case. The revelation may be of signal use to assist and enlighten our reason in the knowledge of things which we could not have known at all, or not so certainly, by our own unassisted reason without it, is plainly signified by St. Paul, and is what the whole Gospel supposes. And on the other hand it is manifest, that reason is necessary to our understanding revelation, and making a proper use of it; and that in judging of that revelation, and of its meaning and evidences, we must exercise our reasoning faculties and powers: *i. e.* revelation supposeth us to be reasonable creatures, and to have the use of our reason, and addresseth us as such. But this doth not imply that revelation is defective, or that reason is superadded to supply the defects of it. For let revelation be ever so sufficient and perfect in its kind, or well fitted to answer the end for which it is given, yet still reason is necessary to understand and apply it. This is St. Paul's scheme, and there is nothing in it but what is perfectly consistent. It is evident from his writings, that he supposeth the revelation which hath been given to be sufficient for all the purposes for which it was designed, able to make us wise unto salvation, and to instruct us in things of great importance, which reason, if left merely to itself, could not have discovered. And at the same time he supposeth those to whom the revelation is published to be capable of exercising their reasoning faculties, for examining and judging of that revelation, and exhorteth them to do so. And though he frequently asserteth his own apostolical authority, and the revelation he received from Jesus Christ, yet he useth a great deal of reasoning in all his Epistles. Thus are reason and revelation to be joined together, and are mutually helpful to one another. And in this view there is a real harmony between them. And what there is in this scheme that looks like madness, it is hard to see.

His Lordship, in his prejudice against St. Paul, carrieth it so far as to pronounce, that "St. Paul received nothing immediately from Christ:" though this apostle himself, in the passage before referred to, affirms, that he received the Gospel he preached, *not of man, neither was he taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ*. He adds, that "St. Paul had no apostolical commission, except that which he assumes in the Acts of the Apostles, written by St. Luke, and dictated probably by himself."† And again, that "he entered a volunteer into the apostleship; at least his extraordinary vocation was known to none but himself." And if St. Paul dictated that account to St. Luke, it deserves the greatest credit, since he was the properest person in the world to give an account of it. But the

* Works, vol. iv. p. 171.

† Ibid. vol. iv. p. 388, 389.

truth of his apostolical commission did not depend merely upon his own word. It was made manifest by the most illustrious proofs and credentials, to which he could with confidence appeal,* and was acknowledged by the other apostles, though this writer is pleased to insinuate the contrary.† Indeed the plain meaning of his whole charge here is, that St. Paul was an impostor, and that his call to the apostolical office was entirely his own fiction. But the great absurdity of this pretence has been so fully exposed in Sir George Lyttleton's *Observations on the Conversion and Apostleship of St. Paul*, that it is perfectly needless to add any thing farther on that head. I shall only observe, that whosoever with a candid and unprejudiced mind considers the whole character and conduct of that great apostle, as represented in the Acts of the Apostles, and the temper and spirit which breathes in his admirable Epistles, will be apt to think that never was there among mere men a more perfect character than that of St. Paul. In him we may behold a shining example of the most exalted and unaffected piety towards God, the most fervent and active zeal for the divine glory, yet not a blind enthusiastic heat, but a zeal according to knowledge, and conducted with great prudence: the most extensive and disinterested charity and benevolence towards mankind, and the most earnest and affectionate concern for their salvation and happiness; the most steady fortitude and constancy under the severest trials and sufferings, which he endured with patience, and even with joy, supported and animated by the earnest desire he had to serve the glorious cause of truth and righteousness, and by the sublime hopes of an everlasting reward in a better world for his faithful services in this. Never was there a truer greatness of mind than that which he manifested. And all this accompanied with a most amiable humility, and a great tenderness of spirit in bearing with the weakness and infirmities of others. He was a most glorious instrument in the hand of Providence for promoting the sacred interests of pure and undefiled religion in the world. Our author says, that Socrates was the *apostle of the Gentiles in natural religion*, as St. Paul was *in revealed*.‡ But no instance can be brought of any one person whom the former converted from the prevailing polytheism and idolatry. And how should this be expected, when he himself, as his Lordship owns, countenanced it by his own practice, and was *for the religion established by the laws*?§ But the latter turned thousands in many different nations from darkness unto light, and from serving idols to serve the living and true God, and from the most abandoned vice and dissoluteness of manners to the practice of virtue and righteousness; which he performed in opposition to the seemingly most insuperable difficulties, and through a succession of the greatest labours and sufferings that any one man ever endured. This has always highly recommended him to the esteem and admiration of those who have a zeal for true original Christianity. And on the other hand, the enemies of our holy religion have always discovered

* 2 Cor. xii. 11, 12.

† Gal. xi. 7, 8, 9.

‡ Works, vol. iv. p. 193.

a peculiar aversion to this excellent person, who was so successful an instrument in propagating it. And this seems to be the true reason of that obloquy and reproach which Lord Bolingbroke has been so industrious to fix on so admirable a character.

His real intentions towards Christianity will farther appear, if we consider the attempts he hath made to invalidate the proofs and evidences of it.

He frequently speaks with the utmost contempt of those that insist upon the internal characters of a divine original, which are to be observed in the revelation delivered in the holy Scriptures. By rejecting the internal characters, he pretends to assert the authority of the Bible, and very gravely advises the divines to confine themselves to the external proofs, and to dwell very little on the internal characters; and represents them as talking a great deal of blasphemy on this head.* And yet he himself, as appears from some of the passages that have been above cited, has acknowledged several things with regard to Christianity as taught in the gospels, which have been deservedly reckoned among the internal characters, which lead us to acknowledge that it came from God: such as, the excellent tendency of its doctrines, precepts, and sacraments; its being *one continued lesson of the strictest morality, of justice, of charity, and universal benevolence*; its being *a complete system, to all the purposes of religion natural and revealed*; its *plainness and simplicity, which, he says, shewed that it was designed to be the religion of mankind, and manifested likewise the divinity of its original*. It is true that he charges those with *madness, and something worse than madness*, who, in arguing concerning the internal characters, “pretend to comprehend the whole economy of the divine wisdom from Adam down to Christ, and even to the consummation of all things, and to connect all the dispensations.” And this is one part of his quarrel with St. Paul, whom, as well as the divines, he very unfairly represents as undertaking to *show the sufficient reason of Providence in every particular instance* from the beginning of the world to the end of it.† But however he is pleased to represent it, it is a noble contemplation, and highly for the honour of the sacred writings, that there we may observe one and the same glorious plan carried on by the divine wisdom and goodness from the beginning, for the recovery and salvation of lapsed man: successive revelations communicated at different times and in divers manners, and at the distance of several ages from one another, yet all subservient to the same glorious purposes, and mutually confirming and illustrating each other: the law and the prophets in their several ways conspiring to prepare the way for the revelation of Jesus Christ, and to furnish divine attestations to it. The religion carried on under the several dispensations, still for substance the same; and whatever seeming variety there may be in the parts, an admirable harmony in the whole.

His Lordship, speaking of what he calls the *internal proofs* of

* Works, vol. iii. p. 271, 272. vol. iv. p. 229.

† Ibid. vol. iii. p. 271, 272. vol. iv. p. 129.

the Christian revelation, observes, in a sneering way, that "the contents of the whole Christian system laid down in our scriptures are objects of such a probability, as may force assent very reasonably in such a case, without doubt; although a concurrence of various circumstances, improved by the credulity of some men, and the artifice of others, forced this assent in cases not very dissimilar."* He has not thought fit to produce an instance of a false revelation, whose evidence can be justly compared to that of Christianity. And as to his expression of *forcing assent* by a *probability*, it is, like many others of his, very improper. No Christian talks of forcing assent, nor would a forced belief have any great merit in it. But that there are sufficient grounds to make it reasonable to assent to it, is very true. And this is what his Lordship ought to have acknowledged, if, as he himself confesses, "it has all the proofs which the manner in which it was revealed, and the nature of it, allowed it to have."† This is in effect to own, that the proofs of Christianity are sufficient in their kind. And if this be the case, it is, according to the rule he himself has laid down, unreasonable to demand more. For he observes, that "common sense requires that every thing proposed to the understanding, should be accompanied with such proofs as the nature of it can furnish. He who requires more, is guilty of absurdity: he who requires less, of rashness."‡

With regard to the external proofs of Christianity, his Lordship does not, as several of the deistical writers have done, deny miracles to be proper or sufficient proofs. On the contrary, he sometimes affects to cry up the mighty efficacy of miracles as alone sufficient, without any consideration of the goodness of the cause for which they were wrought, or examination of the doctrines they attest; and finds fault with "that maxim as contrary to common sense, that is not for admitting miracles as proofs of a divine original, without consideration of the cause or doctrines: since real miracles can be operated by no power but that of God, nor for any purpose, by consequence, but such as infinite wisdom and truth direct and sanctify."§ Accordingly he declares, speaking of the Christian revelation, that "considering the glorious person by whom it was brought, and the stupendous miracles that were wrought to confirm it, we might be ready to conclude, that it must have forced conviction, and have taken away even a possibility of doubt."|| And he repeats it again, that "Christianity was confirmed by miracles, and the proof was no doubt sufficient for the conviction of all those who heard the publication of this doctrine, and saw the confirmation of it. One can only wonder that any such remained unconvinced."¶ His design was undoubtedly to insinuate, that the miracles were not really wrought; because, if they had been wrought, they must have convinced all those that saw them. To talk of miracles as forcing conviction is to carry it to an unreasonable extreme, as any man must be sensible, that considers human

* Works, vol. v. p. 93.
§ Ibid. vol. iv. p. 227, 228.

† Ibid. p. 91.
|| Ibid. p. 461.

‡ Ibid. vol. iii. p. 246.
¶ Ibid. p. 91.

nature, and the mighty influence of prejudices, passions, and worldly interests. We have however his concession, that miracles are sufficient for convincing those who saw them: and if so, they must be proportionably sufficient for the conviction of those who have a reasonable ground of assurance, that these miracles were really wrought, though they were not themselves eye-witnesses of them. The original proof of Christianity therefore was by his own account every-way sufficient. The only question that remains is, whether we have proper evidence to convince us that these miracles were actually performed. And of this we have evidence sufficient to satisfy every candid and impartial enquirer, and all that could be reasonably insisted upon in such a case. For the proof of this I shall refer to what has been already observed in my fourth Letter, in answer to Mr. Hume.

The most remarkable of all the miracles by which the divine authority of the Christian religion is confirmed, is the resurrection of Jesus Christ. And as to this, his Lordship observes, that "Christ scarce showed himself to the few who were said to have seen him after his resurrection in such a manner, as they could know by it certainly that it was he whom they had seen. I say the few, because St. Paul, who had not probably ever seen Jesus, deserves no credit when he affirms against the whole tenor of the gospels, that he and above five hundred brethren at once had seen him after his resurrection." He has here plainly let us know, that after all his professed regard to Christianity, he is very willing to deny that which is the principal proof of our Saviour's divine mission, and to which he himself ultimately appealed as such. But we have nothing but confident assertions, after his Lordship's manner, and a bold charging St. Paul with a falsehood, without the least proof: for as to his pretence, that it is contrary to the whole tenor of the gospels, there is no foundation for it. The more to expose St. Paul, he represents it as if he had affirmed, that he himself was present, and saw Jesus at the same time that he was seen of five hundred brethren at once. Whereas he saith no such thing, but rather the contrary, 1 Cor. xv. 6. 8. But as to Christ's being seen by so many persons, St. Paul speaks of it as a thing certainly known, and that the greater part of them were then alive when he wrote to the Corinthians. And the question is, whether St. Paul is to be believed in a fact which he publicly affirmed in that very age, and for the truth of which he appeals to great numbers of persons then living, or this writer, who, at the distance of seventeen hundred years, gives us his own word for it that there was no such thing? But I shall not need to add any thing farther on this subject here, having considered it so fully in the twelfth Letter of this volume, which contains remarks on *the Resurrection of Jesus considered*.

The accounts of the extraordinary facts whereby Christianity was attested, as well as of its original doctrines, are transmitted to us in the sacred writings of the New Testament, particularly in those of the Evangelists, and in the Acts of the Apostles. And it has

the earth as it was, and the former, the spirit shall return to God that gave it; and that there shall be a future account, in which every work shall be brought into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good or whether it be evil: The assumption of Elias into heaven, which naturally led the thoughts of all that heard of it to another world, where good men shall be eminently rewarded: All these things, not to mention several passages in the Psalms and in the Prophets which plainly look this way, convince me, that a future state was all along believed among the people.* And indeed it does not appear, that, at the time of Moses, any man had arisen, as there did in the latter ages, who, through the vain deceit and false refinements of philosophy, denied it. As to the promises and threatenings addressed to the people of Israel as a collective body, of which kind those seem to be which are mentioned, Lev. xxvi. and Deut. xxviii. these no doubt were directly and immediately of a temporal nature; and the striking representations that are there made of the consequences of their obedience or disobedience in this present world, seem very well fitted to make strong and vigorous impressions upon them, and to give them a lively sense of the constant interposition of divine providence. But besides this, the tenor of their law led them to think that the happiness of every individual person among them, and his interest in the favour of God, depended upon his obedience to the divine commands, and the practice of righteousness. This especially seems to have been the design of that general declaration in the law, that the man that did the precepts there enjoined should *live* by them. And there is no reason to think that they looked upon this as wholly confined to this present world. That it was understood to have a more extensive view, may be reasonably concluded from what is said in the eighteenth chapter of Ezekiel, where the equity of the divine proceedings is vindicated, and where it is expressly declared, with the greatest solemnity, concerning every particular person that should forsake his evil ways, and turn to the practice of righteousness, that he should *not die*, but should surely *live*, *i. e.* be happy; and concerning every wicked and impenitent sinner, that he should surely die, *i. e.* be miserable; which must have its principal effect in a future state of rewards and punishments; since even under that constitution it often happened, that particular good men were exposed to many outward evils and calamities, and that bad men had great outward prosperity. What made it more necessary to insist explicitly and fully upon the doctrine of a future state in the gospel, was, that through the corruption of mankind the ancient belief of the immortality of the soul and a future state was very much obscured and defaced. As to the heathens, there were many among those who made great pretensions to learning and philosophy that absolutely rejected it, and most of those who did not positively reject it, yet treated it as a thing doubtful and uncertain. And it had been so much blended with fables, that at last it seemed to have little hold even on vulgar opinion;

* See this more fully proved in the Answer to Dr. Morgan, vol. i. p. 339, et seq.

And the revelation published by his apostles, according to his commission, and under the influence of his Spirit, and by power derived from him, was as truly *the revelation of Jesus Christ*, as St. Paul calls it, as that which he delivered himself in the days of his personal ministry; nor did it really differ from it in any article, but more fully explained several things, than was seasonable, or could be conveniently done, before. So that Christ was faithful to the commission he had received, and the whole was conducted with admirable wisdom, and condescending goodness.

Notwithstanding the fair acknowledgment Lord Bolingbroke had made of the credibility of the Gospels which are now in our hands, he hath thrown out several hints which are plainly designed to destroy the credit of them. Thus he talks of a multitude of different Gospels which were composed in the first ages, he thinks, *no less than forty*—and asks, “If the gospels received into the canon are favourable to the orthodox belief, how do we know that the other gospels were exactly conformable to these?” He talks, as Mr. Hobbes had done before him, as if “the authenticity of the four Gospels depended on the council of Laodicea, which admitted four, and rejected the rest;” and adds, “that every church judged of the inspiration of authors, and of the divine authority of books; and those books were canonized, in which every particular church found the greatest conformity with their own sentiments.”* But this is very unfairly represented. There is nothing capable of a clearer proof, than that there was a general agreement in the churches throughout the world, from the first age of Christianity, in receiving the four Gospels, the Acts of the Apostles, and St. Paul’s Epistles; and that the spurious gospels he speaks of were never generally received in the Christian church as of divine authority: and that the primitive Christians were very careful and scrupulous not to receive any books into the sacred canon, but those of whose authority they had sufficient proofs. Nothing can be more absurd, and more contrary to plain undeniable fact, than to pretend that the sacred books of the New Testament were not looked upon as authentic and divine before the council of Laodicea, which was not held till after the middle of the fourth century. They were not first made so by that council, which only declared what had been long before received as of divine authority in the Christian church. I need not say any more upon this subject in this place, but shall refer to the fourth Letter of this volume, which contains some account of Toland’s *Amyntor*, and the answers that were made to it. To which may be added, what I have offered in the *Reflections on Lord Bolingbroke’s Letters on the Study and Use of History*, at the end of this volume.

In order to weaken the credit of the original sacred records of the Christian religion, his Lordship hath further observed, that “in other historians, if the passages which we deem genuine should be spurious, if others should be corrupted or interpolated, and if the

* Works, vol. iv. p. 404, 405.

divine wisdom hath so ordered it, that the revelation was originally contained in several writings, published by different persons, and copies taken of them at different times, all confirming one another, and which render a general corruption of that revelation impracticable. The account of the facts there given is not confined to one book, nor are the articles of religion there mentioned merely mentioned once for all, or drawn up in one form or system; but the facts are so often referred to, and the articles or doctrines so often repeated, and delivered on so many different occasions, that no mistakes in particular passages, or in a particular copy or copies, could destroy the intent or use of the original revelation.

It is with the same view of weakening and invalidating the evidence of Christianity, that his Lordship is pleased to observe what hath been often urged by others of the deistical writers before him, that "the external evidence of the Christian revelation is diminished by time." This he represents as "so evident that no divines would be so ridiculous as to deny it."* And after seeming to grant, in a passage cited above, that the proof of Christianity, by miracles, was sufficient for the conviction of all those who heard the publication of this doctrine, and saw the confirmation of it, he adds, that "this proof became in a little time traditional and historical; and we might be allowed to wonder how the effect of it continued and increased too, as the force of it diminished, if the reasons of this phenomenon were not obvious in history."† As he has not thought fit to mention those reasons, no notice can be taken of them. But he ought not to have represented it as a thing which is universally acknowledged, that the external evidence of Christianity is diminished by time. The absurdity of that maxim, that the certainty and credibility of moral evidence is continually diminishing in proportion to the length of time, has been often exposed; particularly by Mr. Ditton in his *Treatise on the Resurrection*, part ii. The evidence of Christianity hath in some respects increased instead of being diminished, since the first publication of it; especially the proofs arising from the wonderful propagation of the gospel, contrary to all human appearance, notwithstanding the amazing difficulties it had to encounter with; and from the accomplishment of many remarkable predictions which they that lived in the first age of Christianity could not see the completion of.‡ To talk of the proofs becoming *traditional* and *historical* may pass with those that govern themselves by sounds, as if the words *traditional* and *historical*, and *doubtful* and *uncertain*, were terms of the same signification; when every one knows that many facts come to us by tradition and history with such an evidence, that no reasonable man can doubt of them any more than of what he hears or sees. He pronounceth indeed, according to his manner, with a decisive tone, that "it was not possible, that traditions derived from the first and through the most early ages of Christianity, should convey either facts or doctrines

* Works, vol. iv. p. 269, 270.

† Ibid. vol. v. p. 91.

‡ This is fully shown by Mr. Le Moine on Miracles, p. 252—260.

down with a due authenticity and precision, unless a continued miracle had subsisted to alter the nature of things, and to produce effects repugnant to their causes."* This is very positively determined; but we have no proof of it but his own authority. And if it be understood not merely of facts or doctrines delivered down by oral tradition, which for the most part cannot be much depended upon, but of facts or doctrines contained in the sacred writings, there is no real foundation for this assertion. We have proof sufficient to convince any reasonable person, as I shall hereafter show,† that those writings were published in the first age of the Christian Church, whilst the apostles, and their immediate companions, the first publishers of Christianity, were yet alive. In which age, if any had attempted to corrupt those writings in the accounts of doctrines and facts, such an attempt must have been unavoidably detected and exposed. And in the age immediately succeeding, those writings became so generally dispersed and known, so many copies of them were taken, and spread through different countries, they were had in such veneration among Christians, and so constantly read in their religious assemblies, that a general corruption of them would have been an impossible thing. Nor can any time be fixed upon from that age to this, in which such a general corruption of them could have been accomplished: and all attempts to prove such a corruption have been evidently vain and ridiculous, and have turned only to the confusion of those who have pretended it. As to what he urges about the false apostles and teachers in the first age, and their high pretensions to revelations and extraordinary gifts, and the many sects which were then formed; and that though the apostles opposed them, "it was often without effect, and always with great difficulty, as we may judge by that which St. Paul had to maintain his authority in the church of Corinth, and others;"‡ this is so far from diminishing the original evidence of Christianity, that it rather confirms it. Since the evidence brought for the true Christian religion by the apostles and first publishers of it, must have been exceeding strong and cogent, and their authority, which had nothing but the force of truth, and the attestations given to their divine mission, to support it, must have been on a very solid basis, which was able to overcome all those complicated difficulties, arising from open enemies without, Jews and heathens, and from false brethren within, and the scandals and offences of the several sects which sprung up under various leaders, some of them persons of great parts and subtilty, and who put on very specious appearances. What strong proofs of a divine original, and what a mighty energy must have accompanied genuine primitive Christianity, by which it triumphed over all the apparently insuperable difficulties and oppositions of all kinds, which it had to encounter with, even at its first appearance!

* Works, vol. iv. p. 398.

† See Reflections on Lord Bolingbroke's Letters on the Study and Use of History.

‡ Works, vol. iv. p. 398.

The propagation and establishment of Christianity, taking it in all its circumstances, is indeed a most astonishing event, and has been always justly regarded as furnishing an argument of great weight to prove its divine original, and the truth of the extraordinary facts and attestations by which it was confirmed. Lord Bolingbroke was sensible of this, and therefore has done what he could to take off the force of it, by endeavouring to account for the spreading of Christianity without any thing extraordinary or supernatural in the case. To this purpose he observes, that "indulgence to the Jews and to the Gentiles, in order to gain both, was a fundamental principle of apostolical conduct from the first preaching of the Gospel: and that by such prudent conduct the Gospel was successively propagated, and converts flocked apace into the pale of Christianity from these different and opposite quarters."* He treats this, as if it were a piece of political conduct in St. Paul and the other apostles, in which they deviated from the original plan laid down by our Saviour himself. But this is a great mistake. The taking the Jews and Gentiles into the Christian Church, and uniting them both into one body, was part of the original plan of Christianity, which was evidently designed by the great Author of our holy religion, in accomplishment of the glorious scheme formed by the divine wisdom from the beginning, and which had been clearly pointed out in the ancient prophecies. But so far was the indulgence shown to the Gentiles, and the incorporating them into the Christian Church along with the Jews, from helping to bring the Jews into it, that it was one of the greatest obstacles to their entering into the pale of Christianity, and raised in them strong prejudices against it, which had so far possessed the minds even of the apostles, that it was with great difficulty, and by degrees, that they themselves were brought to embrace this part of the Christian scheme. Nor can it be supposed that St. Paul, who had been educated in the school of Gamaliel, and in the strictest Pharisaical notions, for which he was extremely zealous, would of himself have ever formed such a scheme, in opposition to all his prejudices, if it had not been, as he himself affirms, communicated to him by a divine revelation, which came to him with an evidence that absolutely convinced him, and overpowered all his prejudices.

With regard to the Gentiles, the taking them into the Christian Church was only an admitting them into the body of those who professed the belief and acknowledgment of a crucified Saviour. And what was there in this to allure or engage them to forsake their ancient religion, and those superstitions and idolatries to which they were so strongly addicted? To tell the Jews, that they should form one Church with the Gentiles, whom they looked upon with disdain, as utterly unworthy of such a privilege; and to tell the Gentiles that they should form one Church with the Jews, for whose religion and nation, his Lordship observes, that they had a *contempt and aversion*; and that they should with them be reckoned among the

* Works, vol. iv. p. 316.

them by asserting the divine mission of the Publisher, who proved his assertions at the same time by his miracles; and it enforces the whole law of faith by promising rewards, and threatening punishments, which he declares he will distribute when he comes to judge the world.* And he afterwards repeats it, that "Christianity, as it stands in the gospel, contains not only a complete but a very plain system of religion. It is in truth the system of natural religion, and such it might have continued, to the unspeakable advantage of mankind, if it had been propagated with the same simplicity with which it was originally taught by Christ himself."† He says, that "supposing Christianity to have been a human invention, it had been the most amiable and the most useful invention that was ever imposed on mankind for their good: And that Christianity, as it came out of the hands of God, if I may use the expression, was a most simple and intelligible rule of belief, worship, and manners, which is the true notion of a religion. As soon as men presumed to add any thing of their own to it, the human alloy corrupted the divine mass, and it became an object of vain, intricate, and contentious science."‡ After having observed, that "the political views of Constantine, in the establishment of Christianity, were to attach the subjects of the empire more firmly to himself and his successors, and the several nations which composed it to one another, by the bonds of a religion common to all of them; to soften the ferocity of the armies; to reform the licentiousness of the provinces; and by infusing a spirit of moderation, and submission to government, to extinguish those principles of avarice and ambition, of injustice and violence, by which so many factions were formed, and the peace of the empire so often and so fatally broken;" he declares, that "no religion was ever so well proportioned, nor so well directed, as that of Christianity seemed to be, to all these purposes." He adds, that "it had no tendency to inspire that love of the country,§ nor that zeal for the glory and grandeur of it, which glowed in the heart of every Roman citizen in the time of the commonwealth; but it recommended what Constantine liked better, benevolence, patience, humility, and all the softer virtues."|| He alloweth, that "the gospel is in all cases one continued lesson of the strictest morality, of justice, of benevolence, and of universal charity." He mentions "Christ's blaming his disciples for been willing to call for fire from heaven against the Samaritans: And that the miracles wrought by him, in the mild and beneficent spirit of Christianity, tended to the good of mankind."¶ He observes, that "the theology contained in the gospel lies in a narrow compass. It is marvellous indeed, but it is plain, and it is employed throughout to enforce natural religion."*** After having said, that "the articles of faith have furnished matter of contention in, as well as from the apostolical age, and have added a motive to

* Works, vol. iv. p. 314.

† Ibid. p. 316.

‡ Ibid. p. 394, 395.

§ That Christianity tends to produce and promote a true love to our country, in that sense in which it is properly a virtue, see above, vol. i. p. 59, 60, marg. note.

|| Works, vol. iv. p. 433.

¶ Ibid. p. 188, 189.

*** Ibid. p. 261.

were discountenanced, and were treated as persons that *walked disorderly*. It was a constitution established by apostolical authority as in the name of Christ, that if "any would not work, neither should he eat;" and that every man should "work with quietness," and "eat his own bread;" and that he should "labour, working with his hands that which is good, that he might have to give to him that needeth." 2 Thess. iii. 10—12. Eph. iv. 28. That spirit of charity and brotherly love which prevailed among the first Christians, was a noble effect of the Gospel of Jesus; and that which so opened their hearts and hands was the full conviction and persuasion they had of the truth and divinity of our holy religion. Thus *faith worked by love*. As to the reflections he makes upon their selling their possessions, and laying the money at the apostles' feet, from whence he concludes, that *less than the whole would not satisfy the Church*, this and the case of Ananias and Sapphira, are considered in the remarks on Chubb's posthumous works in Letter XIV. p. 189. et. seq. to which I choose to refer rather than be guilty of unnecessary repetitions.

It is a topic often insisted upon by the deistical writers, that revealed religion, particularly the Christian revelation, has been of little or no advantage for promoting the reformation of mankind. Lord Bolingbroke seems to lay a particular stress upon this. He says, "It may be a full answer to all that Dr. Clarke had advanced against the heathen philosophers, and their being sufficient for the instruction and reformation of mankind, to ask, Whether that reformation which the heathen philosophers could not bring about effectually, has been effected under the Jewish or Christian dispensation?"* What he saith concerning the effects of the Jewish dispensation hath been above considered; I shall here take notice of what he hath observed with regard to the effects of Christianity. He asserteth, that "the world hath not been effectually reformed, nor any one nation in it, by the promulgation of the Gospel, even where Christianity flourished most."† And after mentioning the Christian martyrs and saints, of whom he frequently speaks with great contempt, he observes, that "as to holiness and austerity of life, that of particular men, or of some particular orders of men, will be far from proving the reformation of the world by Christianity; since there were formerly among the heathens, Chaldeans, Gymnosophists, and are now among them and the Mahometans, instances of as great or greater austerity."‡ But he has not fairly represented the argument brought to prove the reformation of the world by Christianity. In order to judge of this, it is necessary to consider the state of the world when Christianity first appeared. Not only were the nations universally involved in the grossest polytheism and idolatry, but never was there an age more immersed in vice, and all manner of wickedness. The picture St. Paul draws of it, Rom. i. 21. 32. shocking as it seems to be, is a very just representation of the general state of the heathen world. But in proportion as the

* Works, vol. v. p. 256.

† Ibid. p. 258.

‡ Ibid. p. 261. et seq.

gospel prevailed, many myriads were "turned from idols to serve the living and true God," brought from the most stupid idolatry to the pure adoration of the Deity, and from the most abominable vices to the practice of virtue and righteousness. He himself acknowledges, that "our Saviour at his coming found the whole world in a state of error concerning the first principle of natural religion, namely, the unity and perfections of God, though not of absolute darkness; and that the spreading of Christianity has contributed to destroy *polytheism* and *idolatry*."* And he observes, that "Eusebius, in the first book of his evangelical preparation, has given a long catalogue of absurd laws and customs, contradictory to the law of nature in all ages and countries, for a very good purpose, to show in several instances, how such laws and customs as these have been reformed by the Gospel."† He takes notice, indeed of "the faults there were among the Christian converts, for which the apostle reproves them; but it is manifest from many passages in the New Testament, that wonderful was the reformation which was then wrought in the religion and manners of men."‡ The primitive Christians were, taking them generally, the most pious and virtuous body of men that ever appeared in the world. And though sometimes the ancient Christian writers, in the ardour of their zeal, complain of the corruption and degeneracy that are growing among them, as Cyprian particularly has done, especially in his book "*De Lapsis*," whose testimony our author more than once refers to, yet it appeareth from many passages in their writings, that the body of the Christians was then remarkably distinguished by the purity of their lives and manners from the Pagans. One of the topics they constantly insist upon in their writings against the heathens, and in their apologies for Christianity, is the mighty change that it wrought in the lives and manners of those who embraced it. And though his Lordship banters Lactantius for the challenge he makes, in a passage to which Dr. Clarke refers, yet this I think may be plainly concluded from it, that the good effects wrought by the Christian religion, in reforming those who were converted to it, were so manifest, that their adversaries themselves were not able to deny it. And accordingly, we have express testimonies of pagan writers to this purpose. 'That of Pliny is very remarkable, and well known. And even Julian, notwithstanding all his prejudices, in his Epistle to Arsacias, recommends the purity and charity of the Christians, and of their priests, to the imitation of the Pagans, and represents it as one cause of the progress Christianity had made; though no doubt they were then degenerated from what they had been in the first ages. As to the present state of the Christian world, his Lordship thinks "it will not be said, that luxury and debauchery have been restrained by Christianity. Where is the court or city in which Christianity is professed, to which that phrase might not be applied, *Daphnicis moribus vivere*?" But there needs little observation to

* Works, vol. iv. p. 243.

† Ibid. vol. v. p. 100.

‡ See 1 Cor. vi. 9, 10, 11.—Eph. iv. 18. 24.—Gal. v. 24.—1 Thess. i. 3. 9, 10.—Col. i. 6.—1 Pet. iv. 3, 4.

convince us, that the corruption and dissoluteness he speaks of is chiefly to be found among those who have little more of Christianity than the name, and who are in reality indifferent to all religion. And if the restraints of the Christian religion were removed, the corruption would certainly be much greater and more general than it is. Many thousands, who would otherwise be very corrupt and dissolute, are engaged by the motives and precepts of Christianity to lead a sober, righteous, and godly life. A real Christian walking according to the rules of the Gospel, and I doubt not that, notwithstanding the corruption complained of, there are still great numbers of such, forms a far more complete and excellent character for virtue, taken in its just extent, as comprehending rational piety and devotion, and extensive benevolence, and exemplary purity of manners, than is to be found among the most admired Pagans. And, indeed, Christians are taught to keep themselves pure from several practices which the heathens scarce looked upon to be any crimes at all. As to what he mentions of the *cruel wars, persecutions, and massacres*, among Christians, he himself acknowledges, that *no part of this ought to be ascribed to the Gospel*, nor can be *reconciled to the principles of it*.^{*} The most effectual way therefore of promoting real piety, virtue and charity, would be to endeavour to engage men to a closer adherence to the doctrines and laws of Christianity, and, instead of setting them loose from its sacred restraints, to enforce its important motives upon their hearts and consciences.

I need not take any particular notice of what his Lordship hath offered against the Christian revelation, drawn from its not having been universally published in all nations and ages.[†] The chief force of what he hath urged depends upon this supposition, that, according to the gospel, all those should be damned, that do not believe in Christ, whether they ever heard of him or not, *damned*, as he expresses it, *even in their involuntary ignorance*;[‡] which is expressly contrary to the tenor of St. Paul's reasoning in the second chapter of the Epistle to the Romans. The declarations made in the gospel of the necessity of believing in Christ, and the punishment of those who do not believe, plainly relate to those who have an opportunity of being acquainted with the Christian revelation. I shall only farther observe, that whereas it has been often urged by the advocates for Christianity, that it appears from the analogy of the divine procedure, that God may, in a consistence with his wisdom and goodness, grant to some men and some nations much greater helps and means for knowledge and moral improvement than to others, our author hath no way of avoiding this, but by boldly asserting, in contradiction to manifest fact and experience, that all men have the *same means*;[§] which is akin to another extraordinary assertion of his, that *there never was a time when it could be justly said, that the law of nature was imperfectly known*;^{||} though he himself frequently represents the greater part of mankind as having

^{*} Works, vol. v. p. 261.

[†] Concerning this objection, see p. 15.

[‡] Works, vol. v. p. 295.

[§] Ibid. p. 294.

^{||} Ibid. p. 202.

cerning Christ's being the great Mediator between God and man, and concerning our redemption by his blood, and concerning a state of future rewards and punishments. And yet he hath endeavoured to subvert all these. Notwithstanding his professed regard for Christianity, he hath on several occasions used his utmost efforts to weaken or destroy the proofs of its divine original, to misrepresent and expose its doctrines and laws, those doctrines which he himself declares to have been original doctrines of the Christian religion. How far such a conduct is consistent with that truth and candour, that honesty and simplicity of heart, which become a sincere inquirer, and who declareth, that he hath nothing but truth in view, may be left to any fair and impartial person to determine.

In my reflections on this part of Lord Bolingbroke's works, the method I shall observe is this : I shall first consider those passages that seem designed to strike at the authority of Christianity in general ; and then shall proceed to consider the objections he hath urged against some particular laws and doctrines of our holy religion.

With regard to Christianity in general, he runs a parallel, in the seventh and eighth of his Fragments and Essays, between the law of nature and Christianity. He compares the clearness and certainty of the former with that of the latter. He compares, also, their sanctions, and endeavours to show, that the law of nature rests on fuller proofs than any that have been found or can be given, of the divine institution of Christianity.* In all that he offers on this head, he goes upon the supposition of the absolute clearness and certainty of the law of nature to the whole human race ; and what he has urged to this purpose has been considered in my ninth letter. But it may be easily shown, that the whole parallel he there draws between the law of nature and Christianity, and between the proofs of the former and of the latter, is entirely impertinent. He himself there declares, that "every friend to Christianity admits, that the Christian law is nothing else than the law of nature confirmed by a new revelation, and that this is what the worst of its enemies does not deny, though he denies the reality of the revelation."† It is not true that the Christian law is nothing else than the law of nature ; but that it comprehends it, that it clears and enforces it, is very true. It does not take off from any rational argument or evidence brought in favour of that law, and besides confirmeth it by an express divine testimony. And must not common sense lead every man to acknowledge, that it must be a mighty advantage to have the law of nature thus farther cleared and confirmed ? The proofs therefore of Christianity, and of the law of nature, are not to be opposed to one another. Both have a friendly harmony ; and Christians have the great advantage of having both these proofs in conjunction. Christianity supposeth the law of nature, clearth it where it was obscured, enforceth it by the strongest sanc-

* Works, vol. v. p. 90. et seq.

† Ibid. p. 93.

LETTER XXXII.

Objections against the Laws and Doctrines of Christianity considered.—The Scripture Precepts not delivered in a formal Code or System, but in a way that is really more useful; and they comprehend all the Duties of Morality.—Concerning our Saviour's Precepts in his Sermon on the Mount.—The Gospel-Law with respect to Polygamy and Divorces not contrary to Reason and Nature, but wise and excellent.—The Christian Doctrine of a Mediator, and of our Redemption by the Blood of Christ, vindicated against his injurious Representation of it.—It gives worthy Ideas of God, and shows the divine Perfections in their proper Harmony.—It is full of Comfort to good Men, but gives no Encouragement to the obstinately wicked and presumptuous.—It is not contrary to Reason, though it could not have been discovered by it.—This Doctrine not owing to the Pride of the human Heart.—Traces of the Doctrine of the Trinity to be found, according to Lord Bolingbroke, in all the ancient theistical Philosophers.

SIR,

HAVING in my last Letter considered what Lord Bolingbroke hath offered with regard to the Christian revelation in general, and its evidences, I now proceed to examine his objections against the laws and doctrines of Christianity.

With respect to the laws of Christianity, he observes, that "Christ did not reveal an entire body of ethics—That the gospel does not contain a code reaching to all the duties of life—That moral obligations are only occasionally recommended—And that if all the precepts scattered about through the whole New Testament were collected and put together in the very words of the sacred writers, they would compose a very short as well as unconnected system of ethics; and that a system thus collected from the writings of heathen moralists would be more full, more entire, and coherent."* But it must be considered, that the New Testament supposes and confirms the authority of the Old. And out of both together might be compiled a much more complete body of ethics, than out of all the writings of the ancient philosophers and moralists, which would be found defective in some duties of great consequence, as was observed before, letter XXVII. p. 385, &c. They are not indeed delivered in a philosophical way, and Lord Bolingbroke himself owns, that "this does not take off from the dignity, the authority, or the utility, even in moral doctrines, of revealed religion.—Since revelation was not given to convince men of the reasonableness of morality—by arguments drawn from the reason of things—but to enforce the practice of it by a superior authority."† They are urged in the name of God, and as his laws. They are not wrought up into a formal code, and delivered merely for all in a system: but they are delivered in various ways, and on different occasions, often in plain and express precepts, at other times by allusions, parables, and comparisons, recommended by excellent exam-

* Works, vol. iv. p. 297.

† Ibid.

ples, and enforced by motives of the highest importance, by divine promises and threatenings. And what shows their great usefulness and excellence, though they seem to be delivered occasionally, yet it is so ordered, that not one duty of consequence is omitted in the holy scriptures. All the duties of morality are there frequently repeated and inculcated, and variously enforced.

His Lordship owns, that "our Saviour's sermon on the mount contains, no doubt, many excellent precepts of morality." And if some of them seem too sublime, he thinks the same reason may be given for them that Tully gives for the severer doctrines of the Stoics. That "men will always stop short of that pitch of virtue which is proposed in them; and it is therefore right to carry the notions of it as high as possible." p. 298, 299. Some have objected it as an instance of our Saviour's carrying things to an excessive rigour, that he not only forbids *murder*, but the being *angry without a cause*; and not only prohibits the gross act of *adultery*, but hath declared, that *whosoever looketh on a woman, to lust after her, hath already committed adultery with her in his heart*. Mat. v. 28. But his Lordship acknowledgeth, that the law which forbids the commission of a crime, does certainly imply, that we should not desire to commit it; and that to want or extinguish that desire is the best security of our obedience.* Yet he afterwards observes, that some of Christ's precepts "were fit and proper enough for a religious sect or order of men, like the Essenes, and might be properly enough exacted from those who were Christ's companions, and disciples in a stricter sense; but, considered as general duties, are impracticable, inconsistent with natural instinct as well as law, and quite destructive of society."† It is acknowledged that some of Christ's precepts were not designed to be of universal obligation at all times, and to all his disciples, but were directed to particular persons, and were only to take place on extraordinary occasions. Such was that which he mentions of selling all and following Christ. But it does not appear, that in any of our Saviour's precepts he had any view to the Essenes, who are not once mentioned in the whole gospel. But as to other precepts which this writer mentions, and which are contained in the sermon on the mount, and directed to all the disciples, as that concerning the not resisting evil, the taking no thought for the morrow, the laying up treasures, not on earth, but in heaven; these precepts, which are delivered in a concise proverbial way, taken in the true sense and intention of them, are of great and general use, as designed to restrain a malevolent revengeful spirit, anxious distracting cares, and an inordinate love of worldly riches. These and other precepts Mr. Chubb had endeavoured to expose, and I shall refer to the remarks that are made in the beginning of the fourteenth Letter.

Among the precepts of Christianity may be reckoned those relating to polygamy and divorces. Our author looks upon a prohibition of polygamy to be a prohibition of what the law of nature

* Works, vol. iv. p. 298, 299.

† Ibid. p. 300.

permits in the fullest manner, and even requires too on several occasions: concerning which see what was observed above, Letter XXVI. As to divorces, he declares, that "with them monogamy may be thought a reasonable institution; without them it is an unnatural, absurd, and cruel imposition; that it crosses the intention of nature, and stands in opposition to the most effectual means of multiplying the human species."* He seems very much to approve the law of Moses for allowing polygamy and divorces, and to think it in this instance much more reasonable and conformable to the law of nature than Christianity is. But he has not fairly represented the Mosaical doctrine concerning divorces. He says, "the legal causes for divorces had a great latitude," among which he reckons this for one, "because the husband found another woman whom he thought handsomer, or whom it was more convenient for him to marry."† Where he represents it, as if these were *legal causes of divorce*, i. e. causes specified in the original law itself: which is not true. It was only a corrupt gloss of some of the Jewish doctors, who in this as well as other instances perverted the design of the original law. There is no express mention of divorces in the Jewish sacred history, after the law made concerning this matter, till they are occasionally mentioned by Isaiah and Jeremiah. In the latter times of the Jewish state, divorces seem to have been more frequent, and for slighter causes; though even then there were many among the Jews, who opposed the loose interpretation of that law given by others of their doctors. This writer mentions "the differences between the schools of Hillel and Sammeas about divorces; and that Christ decided in favour of the latter, and specified but one kind of turpitude as a just cause of divorce."‡ And in this he plainly lets us know he thinks our Saviour was in the wrong. And he goes on to say in a sneering way, that "the law of grace was superior in time to the natural and Mosaical law among Christians."§ What follows is mean banter, mixed with a scandalous insinuation against the chastity of the Blessed Virgin, because Joseph had thoughts of divorcing her, *having suspected her to have been got with child before her marriage*. This he produces as an anecdote from Justin Martyr, as if it were a piece of secret history, when every one that has read the gospel knows, that the evangelist both mentions the suspicion, and shows how causeless it was, and how it was removed, Mat. i. 18—24.

* Works, vol. v. p. 163.

† He is pleased to observe, that "the people of God had an advantage in this respect above other people. Plurality of wives might have made divorces less necessary; or if they were all alike disagreeable, the husbands had the resource of concubines." Where he represents it as if there were an allowance to the people of God, in their law itself, both to have a plurality of wives, and, besides these, to have concubines, *what were not wives*. So it is indeed in the law of Mahomet, where every man is allowed four wives, and as many female slaves as he can keep. But there is no such constitution in the Mosaical law. And the concubines we read of in Scripture, were really wives, though without a dowry; thus in the case of the Levite's concubine, Judges xix. he is said expressly to be her husband, and her father is several times called *her father-in-law*, ver. 3, 4, 5, 7, &c.

‡ Works, vol. v. p. 170.

§ Ibid. p. 171.

He expressly calls polygamy and divorces *institutions which have reason and revelation on their side*; where he seems willing to allow for a while, that the Mosaical law was from God, that he may draw a patronage from thence for polygamy and divorces; and he speaks of them as if they were positive *institutions*, expressly prescribed and enjoined in that law as by divine authority. But this is not fairly represented. They were at best barely permitted. Polygamy is no-where expressly allowed, much less commanded in the law of Moses. But there are several things that plainly imply a disapprobation of it. As particularly the account there given of God's having at the first creation formed one woman for one man, and appointed that there should be an inseparable union between them, and that they *should be one flesh*. And though Moses gives instances of polygamy among some of the patriarchs, they are so circumstanced as to make a very disadvantageous representation of that practice, and the consequences of it. The utmost that can be said is, that it is not expressly prohibited in that law. And there are some wise regulations added, which indeed suppose it to be what was then practised, but seem plainly designed to discourage it, and to correct and restrain the abuses which it tended to produce. See Exod. xxi. 9, 10. Deut. xxi. 15, 16, 17. The law about divorces, Deut. xxiv. 1—4. specifies *some matter of uncleanness* as the cause of divorce, which some of the Jewish doctors themselves, particularly the Caraites, who keep close to the letter of the law, understand of adultery, or at least of some immodest and unchaste behaviour. And Moses supposes the woman that was divorced to be *defiled* by a second marriage, and therefore ordains that the first husband should never have it in his power to take her again; which was manifestly intended to discourage that practice. Our Saviour indeed saith, that *Moses suffered it for the hardness of their hearts*, Mat. xix. 8. This our author is pleased to represent as if Christ maintained, that "God tolerated superstitious practices, or permitted even crimes to have the sanction of his law, because of the hardness of their hearts."* But to this may be applied the distinction which he himself mentions, and seems to approve, made by the Civilians, "between a *plenary* and *less plenary permission*, one of which gives a right to do, and the other exempts from punishment for doing."† It is the latter kind of permission which was given to polygamy and divorces, and which our Saviour refers to, when he talks of their being suffered to do it for the hardness of their hearts; not as if it was what God countenanced and approved, but they were so far suffered to do it as not to incur a legal penalty by doing it; but when he sent his well-beloved Son to bring the clearest and most perfect scheme of religion, this practice was more plainly prohibited than it had been before. And this, instead of being a just objection against the Christian law, is a proof of its great excellence; which has hereby provided for preserving to both sexes their just rights, for strengthening the union between the married pair, which it is of great im-

* Works, vol. v. p. 170.

† Ibid. vol. iv. p. 151. 174.

persons of great name as having been guilty of this madness, and particularly St. Paul.* That reason and revelation are in their several ways necessary, and assistant to each other, is easily conceivable, and so far from being an absurdity, that it is a certain truth. But the stress of his Lordship's observation lies wholly in the turn of the expression, and in the improper way of putting the case. The revelation may be of signal use to assist and enlighten our reason in the knowledge of things which we could not have known at all, or not so certainly, by our own unassisted reason without it, is plainly signified by St. Paul, and is what the whole Gospel supposes. And on the other hand it is manifest, that reason is necessary to our understanding revelation, and making a proper use of it; and that in judging of that revelation, and of its meaning and evidences, we must exercise our reasoning faculties and powers: *i. e.* revelation supposeth us to be reasonable creatures, and to have the use of our reason, and addresseth us as such. But this doth not imply that revelation is defective, or that reason is superadded to supply the defects of it. For let revelation be ever so sufficient and perfect in its kind, or well fitted to answer the end for which it is given, yet still reason is necessary to understand and apply it. This is St. Paul's scheme, and there is nothing in it but what is perfectly consistent. It is evident from his writings, that he supposeth the revelation which hath been given to be sufficient for all the purposes for which it was designed, able to make us wise unto salvation, and to instruct us in things of great importance, which reason, if left merely to itself, could not have discovered. And at the same time he supposeth those to whom the revelation is published to be capable of exercising their reasoning faculties, for examining and judging of that revelation, and exhorteth them to do so. And though he frequently asserteth his own apostolical authority, and the revelation he received from Jesus Christ, yet he useth a great deal of reasoning in all his Epistles. Thus are reason and revelation to be joined together, and are mutually helpful to one another. And in this view there is a real harmony between them. And what there is in this scheme that looks like madness, it is hard to see.

His Lordship, in his prejudice against St. Paul, carrieth it so far as to pronounce, that "St. Paul received nothing immediately from Christ:" though this apostle himself, in the passage before referred to, affirms, that he received the Gospel he preached, *not of man, neither was he taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ*. He adds, that "St. Paul had no apostolical commission, except that which he assumes in the Acts of the Apostles, written by St. Luke, and dictated probably by himself."† And again, that "he entered a volunteer into the apostleship; at least his extraordinary vocation was known to none but himself." And if St. Paul dictated that account to St. Luke, it deserves the greatest credit, since he was the properest person in the world to give an account of it. But the

* Works, vol. iv. p. 171.

† Ibid. vol. iv. p. 388, 389.

And nothing can give a more amiable idea of the Supreme Being, or have a greater tendency to strengthen our hope and affiance in him, than to consider him as a *God in Christ reconciling the world unto himself*, and as having appointed his well-beloved Son, a person of infinite dignity, as the great and only Mediator, through whom he is pleased to communicate the blessings of his grace to sinners of the human race, and in whose name they are to offer up their prayers and praises to him, the Father of mercies, and the God of love. It is impossible to prove that there is any thing in such a constitution unworthy of the supreme and infinitely-perfect Being. And if we are assured by a well-attested revelation, that this is the order appointed by God in his sovereign wisdom, it ought to be received and improved with the highest thankfulness. And it nearly imports those to whom this revelation is made known, to take care that they do not reject the grace and mercy of God, and his offered salvation, by refusing to accept it in that way in which he himself hath thought fit to appoint. If this be a divine constitution (and we are as sure that it is so, as that the gospel is true), they are not chargeable with a slight guilt, who, instead of making a proper use of it, and taking the advantage it is fitted to yield, presume to cavil at it, and rashly to arraign the proceedings of the Supreme Wisdom and Goodness, in a case of which they cannot possibly pretend to be competent judges.

With respect to the doctrine of redemption, which, he observes from Dr. Clarke, is a *main and fundamental article of the Christian faith*, he takes upon him to pronounce, that “the utmost endeavours have been and always must be employed in vain, to reduce the entire plan of the divine wisdom, in the mission of Christ, and the redemption of man, to a coherent, intelligible, and reasonable scheme of doctrines and facts.”* And it is the entire design of the thirty-sixth and thirty-seventh of his Fragments and Essays, to expose that doctrine, and to answer what Dr. Clarke had offered to show, that there is nothing in it contrary to reason.†

He observes, that “the fall of man lies at the foundation of the doctrine of redemption, and that the account of it is irreconcilable to every idea we have of the wisdom, justice, and goodness, to say nothing of the dignity, of the Supreme Being.”‡ I need not add any thing here to what has been already offered on that subject in my thirteenth Letter. The great corruption of mankind has been acknowledged by the most diligent observers in all ages; and great is the guilt and misery they have thereby incurred: and it is no way reasonable to suppose that this was the original state of the human nature. The redemption of mankind is a provision made by infinite wisdom and goodness, for recovering them from the corruption into which they had fallen, and the guilt they had incurred, and for restoring them to righteousness and true holiness, and even raising them to everlasting felicity, in such a way as is most consistent with the honour of God’s government, and of his illustrious

* Works, vol. iv. p. 318.

† Ibid. vol. v. p. 279, et seq.

‡ Ibid. p. 283, 284.

moral excellencies. And if there be some things relating to the methods of our redemption which we are not well able distinctly to explain or comprehend, it is not to be wondered at, considering that these are things of a high nature, and which depend upon the determinations and councils of the divine wisdom, of which, without his revelation of them, we cannot assume to be proper judges.

There are two questions here proper to be considered; one concerning expiation in general; the other concerning that particular method of expiation held forth to us in the Gospel, by the death and sufferings of Jesus Christ, as a sacrifice for the sins of the world.

As to the general question, it can scarce be reasonably denied, that if we consider God as the wise and righteous governor of the world, who is infinitely just as well as merciful; if any expedient can be fixed upon for his pardoning his sinful offending creatures, and dispensing his graces and benefits to them, in such a way as at the same time to manifest his invariable love of order, his just detestation of all moral evil, and the steady regard he hath to the vindicating the authority of his government and laws; this would be most worthy of his rectoral wisdom, and show forth his attributes, especially his justice and mercy, in their proper harmony, so as to render him both most amiable and most venerable.

If it be alleged, that repentance alone is a sufficient expiation, not to repeat what hath been already offered on this head in the XXVIIth Letter, p. 389, it may be demanded whether God could in strict justice punish sinners for their transgressions of his laws, and for the crimes they have committed? If he could, it is because those transgressions and crimes really deserve punishment. If those crimes deserve punishment, it must be an act of free sovereign grace and mercy to remit or not to inflict the deserved penalty. And as it is an act of sovereignty, it must depend upon what shall seem fit to the supreme and infinitely wise and perfect Mind to determine, upon a full view of what is best and properest upon the whole. And are we so well acquainted with what the Infinite Majesty oweth to himself, and what the greatest good of the moral world doth require, as to take upon us positively to determine a thing in which the divine authority and prerogatives, and the reason of his government, are so nearly concerned? Upon what foundation can we pretend to be sure, that the great Governor of the world is obliged to pardon sinners at all times and in all cases, barely and immediately upon their repentance, and even to crown their imperfect obedience, though attended with many failures and defects, with the glorious reward of eternal life? And if no man can pretend without an inexcusable rashness and ignorance to be sure of this, who can take upon him to determine, what expiation or satisfaction for sin, besides the repentance of the sinner, the most wise and righteous Governor of the world may see fit to insist upon? This, if any thing, seems to be a proper subject for divine revelation.

Dr. Clarke had argued, as his Lordship observes, that the "custom of sacrifices which universally obtained shows it to have been the general sense of mankind, that some expiation was necessary

for sin, and that God would not be appeased without some punishment and satisfaction." * Our author speaks of this way of arguing with great contempt.

He says, that "the most absurd notions which superstition ever spread in contradiction to the law of nature and reason, are applied to the proceedings of God with man." But since it is a matter of fact that cannot be denied, that the offering sacrifices to God was one of the most ancient external rites of religion of which we have any account; since it obtained early and universally, not only among polytheists and idolaters, but among the most religious adorers of the one true God; this naturally leadeth us to conclude, that it was a part of the primitive religion originally enjoined to the first ancestors of the human race, and from them transmitted to their descendants. Upon any other supposition it is hard to conceive, how men should come so universally to look upon the taking away the life of a beast, to be well-pleasing in the sight of God, and an acceptable piece of divine worship. The best way of accounting for this seems to be, that it was a sacred rite of divine appointment, which was originally intended for wise and valuable purposes; viz. to impress men's minds with a sense of the evil and demerit of sin, and to be an acknowledgment on the part of the sinner that his sins deserved punishment; and at the same time to be a pledge and token of God's being willing to receive an atonement, and of his pardoning grace and mercy. And since it appears to have been an original part of the divine scheme, that God would send his Son into the world, in the fulness of time, to suffer and die for the redemption of mankind, in whose blood that covenant was founded, by virtue of which good men in all ages were to be saved upon their repentance, and sincere though imperfect obedience; then supposing that some discovery of this was made to the first parents of the human race after their apostacy, as a foundation for their hope and comfort, this gives a most reasonable account of the institution of such a sacred rite; than which nothing could be better fitted to keep up a notion and expectation of a suffering Redeemer, and to be a constant memorial to them both of their own guilt and of the divine mercy. And hence those sacrifices were very properly accompanied with prayers, confessions of sin, and thanksgivings, and were regarded as federal rites, and tokens of friendship and reconciliation between God and man. But this, like other parts of the primitive religion, became corrupted. The true original design of sacrifices was forgotten and lost, though the external rite still continued; and they were looked upon as in themselves and of their own nature properly expiatory.

Our way is now prepared to consider the question as it relates particularly to that method of expiation, which is held forth to us in the Gospel by the sufferings and death of our Lord Jesus Christ, a Mediator of infinite dignity. And with regard to this he urgeth, that "our notions of God's moral attributes will lead us to think,

* Works, vol. v. p. 286.

that God would be satisfied more agreeably to his mercy and goodness without any expiation upon the repentance of the offenders, and more agreeably to his justice with any other expiation rather than this.* In opposition to this, it may be affirmed, that supposing an expiation to have been necessary on the behalf of sinful men, none can be conceived more worthy, or more valuable, or more capable of answering the most excellent ends, than that which is set before us in the Gospel.

We are there taught, that upon a foresight of man's apostacy, and the miseries and ruin to which the human race would be exposed by their iniquities and transgressions, God had, in his infinite wisdom and grace, determined to provide a Saviour for recovering them from their guilt and misery to holiness and happiness: and that it was appointed in the divine councils that this Saviour should, in order to the accomplishing this great design, take upon him human flesh, and should not only bring a clear revelation of the divine will to mankind, and exhibit a most perfect example of universal holiness, goodness, and purity, but that he should on the behalf of sinful men, and to make atonement for their offences, submit to undergo the most grievous sufferings and death: that accordingly, in that season which seemed fittest to the divine wisdom, God sent his own well-beloved Son into the world, a person of infinite dignity, upon this most gracious and benevolent purpose and design: That this glorious person actually took upon him our nature, and lived and conversed among men here on earth: That he brought the most perfect discoveries of the divine will that had been ever made to mankind, for instructing them in those things which it was of the highest importance to them to know: That in his sacred life and practice he exhibited all the beauties of holiness, and yielded the most perfect obedience to the divine law, which he exemplified in the dignity of its authority and in the excellency of its precepts: That besides this, prompted by his own generous love to mankind, and in obedience to the divine appointment, he voluntarily submitted for our sakes to the deepest humiliations and abasements, and the most dolorous agonies and passions, followed by a most cruel and ignominious death, that he might obtain eternal redemption for us. He suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us back unto God. By these his sufferings and obedience on our behalf, which was infinitely pleasing in the sight of God, he became the propitiation for the sins of the world, and did that in reality which the sacrifices could only do in type and figure. And on the account of what he hath done and suffered on the behalf of sinful men, God has been graciously pleased to promise to grant a full and free pardon of all their sins, upon their sincere repentance, to communicate to them through this great Mediator the blessings of his grace, and to crown their sincere though imperfect obedience with the glorious reward of eternal life: That accordingly that suffering Saviour having by himself purged our sins, was raised again

* Works, vol. v. p. 286.

from the dead, and crowned with glory and honour : That he now appears for guilty men as their great advocate and intercessor : And is constituted the great dispenser of those spiritual blessings which he had by the divine appointment procured for us, and is the author of eternal salvation to them that obey him.

This is one illustrious instance of what our author declares, that *the theology of the gospel is marvellous*. It could only have been known by divine revelation ; and now that it is discovered to us, it calls for our highest admiration and thankfulness.

Let us now consider the objections he hath urged against it.

He represents it as absurd to suppose, that "God sent his only begotten Son, who had not offended him, to be sacrificed for men who had offended him, that he might expiate their sins, and satisfy his own anger."* As to God's sending his own Son to be the Saviour of sinful men, to redeem them from misery and ruin, and to raise them to eternal life, it cannot reasonably be denied, that the more glorious and wonderful the person was, and the greater his dignity, the better was he fitted for accomplishing the great work to which he was designed ; and the greater value it derived to the obedience he yielded, and the sufferings he endured on our behalf. This writer observes, that "the means of reconciling all sinners to an offended Deity were made by the pagan theology extremely easy." And he particularly instances in expiatory sacrifices.† But no such thing can be justly objected against the doctrine of our redemption by the blood of Christ. It is certainly of the highest importance to mankind, that they should not entertain too slight thoughts of the evil of sin, or look upon it as too easy a matter to obtain the favour of God when they had offended him, or imagine that his just displeasure against sin may be averted by trivial expedients. All this is effectually provided against in the gospel scheme. The expiation in this case is supposed to be effected by a sacrifice of infinite virtue, not to be equalled or repeated. This gives the most effectual conviction, that it is not a slight or trifling matter, to atone for the sins of men, and to offer such an expiation as is suited to the majesty of God to accept. No man that believes this can possibly entertain slight thoughts of the evil and demerit of sin. It tendeth to fill us with the most awful reverential conceptions of the infinite majesty of the Supreme Being, his righteousness and purity, and the inviolable regard he hath to the authority of his government and laws.

As to the other part of the objection, that it is absurd to suppose, that "the Son of God who had not offended should be sacrificed for men who had offended him," the truth is, that if he had not been perfectly innocent and holy, he could not have been properly fitted to expiate the sins of men. Had he been himself guilty and a sinner, instead of making an atonement for the sins of others, he must have been punished for his own. Nor could his oblation have been of such value and merit as to be proper for answering the great ends

* Works, vol. v. p. 286.

† Ibid. p. 210.

for which it was designed. If it be still objected, that it is unjust and cruel that an innocent person should be punished for the guilty, I answer, that it will be allowed, that if the evils and sufferings the guilty had incurred by their crimes should, by the mere arbitrary act and authority of the supreme ruling power, be laid on an innocent person without and against his own consent, this would be contrary to all the rules both of goodness and justice, and would be a confounding the whole order of things. But this is far from being the case. The sufferings of our Lord Jesus Christ were not arbitrarily imposed upon him by the mere authority of God. He himself freely undertook the great work of our redemption. He consented to undergo these temporary sufferings for the most valuable ends, for promoting the glory of God, and the salvation of mankind. The admitting him therefore to suffer on our behalf, was not doing him any injustice, but giving him an opportunity of performing the most wonderful act of obedience, and exhibiting the most astonishing instance of love and goodness towards perishing sinners, from whence, according to the divine compact and covenant, the most glorious benefits were to redound to the human race; and he himself was to be recompensed with the highest glory in that nature which he assumed. It is no hard matter therefore to answer the question our author puts, "Whether the truth of that maxim—that it is not equally fit that an innocent person should be extremely miserable, as that he should be free from such misery—the innocence of the Lamb of God, and the sufferings and ignominious death of Christ, can be reconciled together, and how?"* That Christ endured the most grievous sufferings, and was put to a most cruel and ignominious death, and consequently that in his case a person perfectly innocent was exposed to the greatest sufferings, is a matter of fact which cannot be denied. And it cannot reasonably be pretended, that it renders those sufferings more unjust, that he should suffer on the account of sinful men, to make atonement for their sins, and to procure for them the most valuable blessings, than if he had endured those sufferings without any such view at all. The sufferings of a most holy and righteous person are perfectly reconcileable to all the rules of justice, and to the order and reason of things, provided those sufferings are what he himself hath voluntarily undertaken, and that they answer a most valuable and excellent end for the public good, and that the suffering person himself afterwards receives a glorious recompence. And according to the account given us in the Gospel, all these circumstances concurred in the sufferings of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Dr. Clarke had mentioned some of the excellent ends which the sufferings and death of Christ were designed and fitted to answer: such as, that this method "tends to discountenance and prevent presumption, to discourage men from repeating their transgressions, to give them a deep sense of the heinous nature of sin, and to convince them of the excellence and importance of the laws of God, and

* Works, vol. v. p. 298.

the indispensable necessity of paying obedience to them.”* Lord Bolingbroke has not offered any argument to prove, that redemption by the death of Christ was not well fitted to answer these ends, but in his dictatorial manner has pronounced, that “the prudential reasons assigned by Dr. Clarke for the death of Christ would appear futile and impertinent, if applied to human councils; but in their application to the divine, they became profane and impious.—That the death of Christ, instead of being proper to discountenance presumption, and to discourage men from repeating their transgressions, as Clarke pretends, might, and in fact has countenanced presumption, without discouraging men from repeating their transgressions.”† There is no doctrine but may be abused by the perverseness of bad and licentious men. Sinners may take encouragement from the goodness and mercy of God to continue in their evil courses, in hopes that he will not punish them for their crimes. And on the other hand, the doctrine concerning the justice of God may be abused, to harden men in their sins, and to cut them off from all hopes of mercy, which would have an equal tendency to destroy all piety and virtue, and subvert the very foundations of religion. But the Gospel scheme of our reconciliation by the death of Christ provides admirably against both these extremes. On the one hand, the fullest discoveries are made of the infinite grace and goodness of God towards mankind, in that he gave his only-begotten Son, that through his sufferings and death a way might be opened for redeeming and saving the lost human race. A free and universal offer is made of pardon and salvation to all sinners without exception, that shall accept of offered mercy upon the gracious and reasonable terms which are there appointed. The most exceeding great and precious promises are made, the most gracious assistances are provided to help our infirmities, and we are raised to the privileges of the children of God, and to the most animating hopes of a glorious resurrection and eternal life, as the reward even of our imperfect obedience. It is impossible that any thing should give us a more amiable idea of the Supreme Being, and of his wonderful love to mankind. Nothing can have a greater tendency to enlarge our joys, and to excite the most grateful and devout affections towards our heavenly Father, as the father of mercies, and the God of love, and towards the Lord Jesus Christ, the great Saviour and lover of our natures, and to lay us under the strongest engagements to love and obey him.

But then on the other hand, lest this should be abused, the Gospel presents the Supreme Being as of infinite justice, righteousness, and purity, who hath such a hatred against sin, and such a regard to the authority of his government and laws, that he would not receive guilty transgressors of the human race to his grace and favour, upon any less consideration than the sufferings and sacrifice of his well-beloved Son on their behalf; than which nothing could possibly

* Clarke's Evidences of natural and revealed Religion, p. 351. Ed. 7th.

† Works, vol. v. p. 289.

exhibit a more awful display of God's displeasure against sin : so that he hath taken care to manifest his righteousness and justice, even in the methods of our reconciliation. We are farther assured, that though the sacrifice Christ hath offered be so infinitely meritorious, yet the virtue of it is only applied upon such terms as the divine wisdom hath appointed, *i. e.* to those only that return to God by a sincere repentance and new obedience. So that on this plan the necessity of holiness and obedience is most strongly and effectually secured, since without this there can be no interest in that great atonement, and consequently no hope of pardon and salvation. And the several threatenings are denounced against those who abuse all this grace, and turn it into licentiousness : and they are warned, that their punishments shall be heightened in proportion to the aggravations of their crime. Thus the Gospel scheme of redemption through Jesus Christ hath an admirable propriety and harmony in it, and bears upon it the illustrious characters of a divine original. It giveth the greatest hopes to the upright and sincere, without affording the least ground of encouragement to the obstinately wicked and presumptuous sinner. It represents God as most amiable and most awful, infinitely good, gracious, and merciful, and at the same time infinitely just, righteous, and holy. These characters in a lower degree must concur in an excellent earthly prince ; much more must they be supposed to be united in the highest possible degree of eminence in the Supreme Being, the All-wise and All-perfect Governor of the world.

He concludes his remarks on what Dr. Clarke had offered to show, that the doctrine of our redemption by Christ is not contrary to reason, with a *general reflection or two*. One is this, "Let us suppose a great prince governing a wicked and rebellious people : he has it in his power to punish, but thinks fit to pardon them. But he orders his only and well-beloved son to be put to death, to expiate their sins, and satisfy his royal vengeance." And then he asks, "Would this proceeding appear to the eye of reason, and in the unprejudiced light of nature, wise, or just, or good ? No man dares to say that it would, except it be a divine."* But no divine would put so absurd a case, which, as he represents it, could not possibly answer any valuable end. The King would have no right to put his son to death for the crimes of rebels ; and to do it against his consent, would be the height of injustice and cruelty : and even if he should consent, it would be the irretrievable loss of an hopeful Prince, both to the King his father, and to the community who had an interest in his life. But if a case could be supposed, in which the death of an excellent Prince would be the saving of a state from ruin, and the best and properest means for averting the greatest public evils and calamities, and for procuring the greatest public happiness, I believe it would be acknowledged to be a glorious action for a King to give up his son, and for the Prince his son to give himself up to death, for so extensive a benefit, and would be cele-

* Works, vol. v. p. 289.

brated as such to all succeeding ages. Though still in that case there could be no hope of the suffering person's being restored to life, or to the public, or having a proper reward given him for so consummate a virtue: which makes a vast difference between this case, or indeed any other that could be put in human governments, and our redemption by the sufferings and death of Christ as stated in the gospel.

His second reflection is, that "Dr. Clarke acknowledges, that human reason could never have discovered such a method as this for the reconciliation of sinners to an offended God." From whence he argues, that "therefore it cannot be said, that this method is agreeable to sound unprejudiced reason, which is what Dr. Clarke, here undertook to show."* But there is no inconsistency between these. A thing may be of such a kind, that reason could not have discovered it, and yet when discovered may have nothing in it contrary to reason, and may be such as unprejudiced reason will approve. And this I take to be the case of the scripture doctrine of our redemption. Our author indeed hath attempted to show, that this doctrine is more absurd than any thing that can be found in any system of paganism. But what he offers to this purpose is entirely to be charged, not upon the doctrine itself as laid down in scripture, but upon the base and injurious representation he is pleased to make of it. He concludes with saying, that "the heathens could not imagine any thing so repugnant, as the doctrine of our redemption by the death of Christ, to all their ideas of order, of justice, of goodness, and even of theism."† If these were so, the heathen world were far from being so disposed and prepared for receiving the Christian mysteries as he sometimes pretends they were. It will be acknowledged, that *Christ crucified* was to the Greeks, who had a high conceit of their own wisdom and learning, *foolishness*; but it was the *wisdom and power of God*, as St. Paul expresseth it. And accordingly this doctrine of the cross of Christ triumphed over all the opposition which their boasted learning and philosophy, assisted by the power and authority of the civil magistrate, the influence and artifices of the priests, and the prejudices of the vulgar, and the vices and passions of men, could raise against it. There are, no doubt, great difficulties attending the scheme of our redemption. But this writer, if he were consistent with himself, ought not to make this an objection against its truth or divine original. He observes, that "nothing is more conformable to our ideas of the infinitely Perfect Being, than to believe, that human reason cannot account for the proceedings of infinite wisdom in a multitude of instances, in many of those perhaps that seem the most obvious to it."‡ And he elsewhere declares, that "if infinite wisdom and power created and governs the universe, we must prepare to meet with several appearances, which we cannot explain, nor reconcile to the ideas we endeavour to form of the divine perfections, and which are disproportionable to our and every other finite understanding."§

* Works, vol. v. p. 290. † Ibid. p. 291. ‡ Ibid. p. 182. § Ibid. p. 365.

And finding fault with the pertness and presumption of divines, he says, "it would pass for downright madness, if we were not accustomed to it, to hear a creature of the lowest form of intelligent beings undertake to penetrate the designs, to fathom the depths, and to unveil the mysteries of infinite wisdom, which the most exalted of created intelligencies would adore in silence."* This may be justly turned against himself. It is no presumption to believe what God has revealed of his councils concerning the methods of our salvation, or to think and speak of them as far as he has been pleased to declare them. But it is an inexcusable arrogance to presume to arraign the proceedings of infinite wisdom made known to us in a well-attested revelation, because there are some things relating to them which we are not able distinctly to explain, or to account for. This is what our author hath done with a rashness and insolence that is shocking. Some passages of this kind have been already produced, to which I shall add one more. Speaking of the mystery of our redemption by the blood of Christ, he asserts, that "the love there displayed is partiality, and the justice there showed is injustice—And that injustice and cruelty are united in this; that mankind would not have been redeemed, if the Jews had not crucified Christ; and yet they were rejected and punished for crucifying him."† He here chargeth it as a great injustice and cruelty to reject and punish the Jews for crucifying Christ, because mankind could not have been redeemed without it; and yet he had before observed, that "Christ was sacrificed by men who meant no expiation, and who meant a murder, not a sacrifice."‡ God's bringing the greatest good out of the injustice and wickedness of the Jews, which he foresaw and permitted, but did not cause, is indeed an illustrious proof of his infinite wisdom, but is no extenuation of their crime; and therefore there was no injustice in punishing them for it. But if the Jews had not crucified Christ, which is the case this writer puts, and which depends upon the modest supposition of God's being mistaken in his prescience, it would not follow, that his designs for the redemption of mankind would have been disappointed; infinite wisdom would not have been at a loss for proper methods to accomplish its own glorious views.

This is not the only passage, in which our author, who upon all occasions sets no bounds to his invectives against the Jews, expresses some pity towards them, as having been very hardly dealt with, in being punished for crucifying our Lord. He observes, that "Christ contrived at his death to appear innocent to the Roman governor, and at the same time contrived to appear guilty to the Jews, and to make them the instruments of his death, by a sequel of the most artful behaviour—That they were rejected for not believing him to be the Messiah—And he kept them in their error; at least he did nothing to draw them out of it, that they might bring him to the cross, and complete the redemption of mankind, without knowing that they did it at their own expence."§ Nothing can possibly be

* Works, vol. v. p. 297.

† Ibid. p. 582.

‡ Ibid. p. 291.

§ Ibid. vol. iv. p. 537, 538, 539.

more unfair and disingenuous than this representation. It is evident, that our Lord took all proper opportunities of laying before the Jews the proofs of his Messiahship; and that nothing could be more wisely conducted than the way he took gradually to remove their prejudices, though he did not make an express and public declaration of his being the Messiah, till the evidence should be completed, and it should plainly appear, that his kingdom was not of this world. Instead of laying plots to engage the Jews to put him to death, he on many occasions used the most prudent precautions to avoid the effects of their malice, till he could do it no longer, without betraying the truth, and counteracting the design upon which he was sent.

The last thing I shall take notice of with regard to what Lord Bolingbroke hath offered concerning the doctrine of our redemption, is, that he represents it as having proceeded from *the pride of the human heart*. He blames Archbishop Tillotson for observing, very pathetically, at the close of one of his sermons, that "when the angels fell, God left them in their fallen state; but when man fell, he sent his Son, his only-begotten Son, his dearly-beloved Son, to redeem the race by his sufferings and passion." Upon which he remarks, that "this raises us not only to an equality with the angels, but to a superiority over them."* And he afterwards censures the divines, for being "unwilling to leave their notions of human worth and importance, or of the designs of God in favour of men;" and says, that "though our religion forbids pride, and teaches humility, yet the whole system of it tends to inspire the former." He instances in its teaching, that "man was made after the image of God, and that God abandoned myriads of angels, but determined to raise man from his fall by the sacrifice of his Son." And he asks, "is it possible to conceive higher notions of a created being than these revealed truths must inspire?"† It is certain, that, according to the scripture account, God *spared not the angels that sinned*, though originally superior to the human race, but sent his Son to redeem mankind. And undoubtedly there were wise reasons for that proceeding, which God hath not thought fit to reveal to us, and which therefore we cannot pretend to judge of. But whatever was the reason of it, God's extending his grace and mercy to mankind in so marvellous a way, certainly demandeth our most grateful acknowledgments. We are taught every where in scripture to ascribe the great things God hath done for us, not to any worthiness in ourselves, but merely to his sovereign unobliged grace and goodness. It is manifest that the whole scheme of Christianity tendeth to inspire us with the most adoring thoughts of God's infinite majesty, greatness, and purity, and at the same time to impress and affect our hearts with the most humbling sense of our own meanness, guilt, and unworthiness. It tendeth not to inspire us with pride, but with gratitude for undeserved favours and benefits; and at the same time that it filleth us with the highest admiration of the divine condescension and goodness towards us, it teacheth us to sink low into the very dust before

* Works, vol. iv. p. 506, 507.

† Ibid. vol. v. p. 347.

his glorious majesty, acknowledging that we are less than the least of his mercies, and giving him the whole glory of our salvation.

It is observable, that Lord Bolingbroke seems on many occasions very solicitous to prevent our having too high a conceit of our own excellence and importance. He blames the pagan theists for flattering human nature, when they taught, that a good man imitates God, and that God is a lover of mankind, and made man to be happy.* To human pride and ambition he attributes the notion of the soul's being a spiritual substance distinct from the body, and the belief of its immortality.† To this also he ascribes the doctrine of a particular providence, and the notion that God is attentive to the prayers and wants of men; and is ready on many occasions to assist, protect, and reward the good, and to punish or reclaim the wicked.‡ It seems then that, for fear of being thought too proud and assuming, we must deny that we have any souls distinct from our bodies, or at least must confess them to be like our bodies, corruptible and mortal; we must not dare to aspire after a conformity to the Deity in his moral excellencies, nor to think that he loveth us, or is concerned for our happiness; we must either not address ourselves to him at all, or not presume to imagine that he heareth or regardeth our prayers. It would be thinking too highly of our own importance to imagine, that God exerciseth any care or inspection over us, or that he taketh notice of our actions with approbation or displeasure, or will call us to an account for them. Thus this sagacious writer hath found out the secret of banishing religion out of the world, under pretence of guarding against the pride of the human heart.

I need not take any particular notice of what his Lordship hath offered concerning the doctrine of the Trinity. He affirms, that "the Scriptures which are come down to us are very far from being vouchers of the Trinity we profess to believe.—And that we may assure ourselves, that many of the Scriptures and traditions which obtained in the primitive ages, deposed against this Trinity."§ Where he talks with as much confidence of Scriptures and traditions which he supposes to be lost, and of what was contained in them, as if he himself had seen and read them. He chargeth St. Peter and St. Paul with inconsistency and contradiction, in sometimes calling Christ a man, and at other times talking a different language, and calling him God.|| Though supposing him to have the human nature in a near union with the divine, there is no contradiction in it at all. He has a long marginal note about the sentiments of the primitive fathers concerning the Trinity, and censures bishop Bull.¶ And he afterwards enlarges on the differences among Christians relating to it, and the disputes between Arius and Athanasius.** But he says nothing on this subject but what is very common, and has been often more fully and distinctly insisted upon by others, and therefore deserves no particular consideration here.

* Works, vol. v. p. 317, 318. † Ibid. vol. iv. p. 481. ‡ Ibid. vol. v. p. 418.
§ Ibid. vol. iv. p. 408. || Ibid. p. 488. ¶ Ibid. p. 98, et seq. ** Ibid. p. 463, et seq.

What seems more peculiar to him is, that in the account he gives of the doctrine of the Trinity, he represents it as having been originally derived from the heathen theology. He says, that the heathen philosophers "assumed a Trinity of divine hypostases in the Godhead. They held a Monad or Unity above all essence, a second proceeding eternally from the first, and a third proceeding eternally from the second, or from the first and second."* That the hypothesis of the Trinity made a part of the Egyptian theology. "It was brought from Egypt into Greece by Orpheus, whosoever he was, and probably by others in that remote antiquity: and that it was in much use afterwards: and we find the traces of it in all the theistical philosophers taught."† He speaks of the Egyptian, Pythagorean, Platonic, and of the Zoroastrian, Chaldaic, and Samothracian Trinity.‡ And he mentions it also as having been anciently taught among the Chinese, and produces a passage out of one of their ancient books to this purpose.§ A late ingenious author has carried this still farther, and has endeavoured at large to show, that some vestiges of the doctrine of the Trinity are to be found among the sages of all nations, times, and religions.|| But he differs from Lord Bolingbroke in this, that whereas his Lordship charges it on the vain subtleties and reveries of the ancient metaphysical theology, this gentleman supposes it must have been owing to supernatural revelation, or some tradition originally derived from thence. And I cannot help thinking, that supposing the fact to have been as they both represent it, this seems to be a more reasonable way of accounting for it. Since it is otherwise not easy to conceive how it should come to pass, that so many great and wise men in different ages and nations, from the most ancient times, should have agreed in acknowledging some kind of triad in the divine nature.

I shall only take notice of one passage more in Lord Bolingbroke's works relating to the Trinity: it is this: that "the doctrine of the Trinity gives the Mahometans as much reason to say, that the revelation which Mahomet published was necessary to establish the unity of the Supreme Being, in opposition to the polytheism which Christianity had introduced, as Christians have to insist, that the revelation which Christ published a few centuries before, was necessary to establish the unity of the Godhead against the pagan polytheism."¶ But the case was very different. The unity of God could not be more strongly and expressly asserted than it is in the holy Scriptures, both of the Old Testament and the New; so that the pretended revelation of Mahomet was needless in this respect. It is a fundamental principle of Christianity, that there is but one God, and one Mediator between God and man, and that Jesus Christ is he. Those who maintain the doctrine of

* Works, vol. iv. p. 94, 95.

† Ibid. p. 97. 470, 471.

‡ Ibid. p. 472.

§ Ibid. vol. v. p. 230.

|| See Chevalier Ramsay's *Principles of Natural and Revealed Religion*, vol. ii. chap. 2.

¶ Works, vol. iv. p. 501.

the Trinity still hold the unity of the Godhead. Convince them that the Trinity is inconsistent with that unity, and they will abandon it. They cannot therefore be justly charged with polytheism, which is only imputed to them by a consequence which they expressly deny and disavow.

LETTER XXXIII.

The Christian Doctrine of future Retributions vindicated.—It does not charge God with Injustice in this present State.—Future Punishments not contrary to Reason or the divine Attributes.—The Pretence, that they can be of no Use either for Reparation or Terror, examined.—The Rewards and Punishments of a future State shall be proportioned to the different Degrees of Virtue and Vice.—The Propriety of appointing a State of Trial to reasonable Beings.—It is wisely ordered, that the Sentence at the Day of Judgment shall be final and irreversible.—The Christian Representation of that Judgment and its Consequences, solemn and affecting, and of excellent Use.—Lord Bolingbroke's injurious Charge against the primitive Christians.—His Complaints of the Corruptions brought into the Christian Church.—Such Writers very improper to set up for Reformers.—True genuine Christianity needs not fear the Assaults of its ablest Adversaries.—Conclusion of the Observations on Lord Bolingbroke's Posthumous Works.

SIR,

IT is a satisfaction to me, as I am apt to think it is to you, that the work is drawing near to a conclusion; and the more so, as you know that I have, during a considerable part of the time in which I have been engaged in it, laboured under great indisposition of body, which has rendered it more tedious and fatiguing to me, than otherwise it would have been. It will be well, if some marks of this do not appear in the performance itself. If this be the case, I hope candid allowance will be made for it.

The only thing that now remains to be considered, with regard to Lord Bolingbroke's attempts against Christianity, relateth to what he has offered concerning the Scripture doctrine of future rewards and punishments. He has done all he could to expose that doctrine, and Christianity on the account of it, especially the doctrine of future punishments. This is the principal design of several of his Fragments and Essays in the latter part of the fifth volume of his works; particularly of the sixty-sixth, sixty-seventh, sixty-eighth, sixty-ninth, seventieth, seventy-first, seventy-second, and seventy-seventh, of those Fragments and Essays.

Before I enter on a distinct consideration of what he has offered on that subject, I would make two general observations.

The one is, that he asserts the doctrine of future rewards and punishments to be an original doctrine of the Christian religion. He expressly asserts, that "future rewards and punishments, are

sanctions of the evangelical law ;” * that “ it was part of the original revelation.—And when the Christians adopted this doctrine, they received the new law and the new sanction together on the faith of the same revelation.” † And indeed it cannot be denied, that this is a doctrine strongly and most expressly insisted on by our blessed Saviour himself, as a doctrine of principal importance. So that this may be justly regarded as a fundamental doctrine of that original Christianity, for which this writer professeth so great an esteem, and the truth, the excellence, and even divinity of which he sometimes pretends to acknowledge.

The other observation is this : that he makes the worst representation imaginable of this doctrine, as both false, and of a pernicious tendency. He asserts, that “ the double sanction of rewards and punishments in a future state was, in fact, invented by men. It appears to be so by the evident marks of humanity that characterise it.—That these notions favour more of the human passions, than of justice or prudence.—That the vulgar heathens believed their Jupiter liable to so many human passions, that they might easily believe him liable, in his government of mankind, to those of love and hatred, of anger and vengeance.—That the Jews entertained such unworthy notions of God, and their system contained such instances of partiality in love and hatred, of furious anger, and unrelenting vengeance, in a long series of arbitrary judgments, that they would be ready to receive this heathenish doctrine of his arbitrary and cruel proceedings hereafter.—That accordingly this doctrine was in vogue in the Church of Moses, when that of Jesus began. And that it made a part of the *original Christian revelation*.” ‡—This doctrine he frequently represents as not only of human invention, but as absurd and impious, and even as *blasphemous* ; and he asserts, that it “ is impossible to reconcile it to the divine attributes.” § And after having said that the Jews “ blended together at once, in the moral character of God, injustice, cruelty, and partiality,” he adds, that “ the moral character imputed to the Supreme Being by the Christian theology, differs little from that imputed to him by the Jewish.” Yea, he makes it the worse of the two.—That “ sudden and violent anger are imputed to him in the one system, slow and silent revenge in the other. That he is represented by the latter as waiting to punish hereafter with unrelenting vengeance and eternal torments, when it is too late to terrify, because it is too late to reform.” || Thus he represents that which he would have pass for an essential article in the original Christian revelation, as giving a worse idea of God than the Jewish revelation, which yet he pretends makes such a representation of the Deity as is worse than atheism.

I shall now examine what he has offered to make good so heavy and injurious a charge.

Some of his arguments are designed, if they prove any thing at

* Works, vol. v. p. 513.

† Ibid. p. 516.

‡ Ibid. p. 515, 516.

§ Ibid.

|| Ibid. p. 532, 533.

all, to bear against future rewards and punishments in general: and some are particularly levelled against the Christian doctrine of future rewards and punishments.

As to the former, some notice has been already taken of what he had urged to invalidate the belief of a future state of retribution. I shall not repeat what has been offered above in the eighth Letter to this purpose, but shall proceed to mention some things, which I had occasion there to insist upon, as they make a part of the argument, as he has managed it, against the Christian revelation.

He charges those who assert, as Dr. Clarke has done, that "future retributions are necessary to set the present disorders and inequalities right, and to justify, upon the whole, the scheme of providence," as in effect maintaining, that "God acts against his attributes, and the perfections of his nature in one system, only to have a reason the more for acting agreeably to them in another,"* He urges, "that it is profane to insinuate, much more to affirm peremptorily, that the proceedings of God towards men in the present life are unjust; and that if that could be admitted, it would be absurd to admit that this may be set right, which means, if the words have any meaning, that this injustice must cease to be injustice on the received hypothesis of his proceedings towards man in another life." And he argues, that "omnipotence itself cannot cause that which has been done not to have been done."† The force of this argument depends upon a gross misrepresentation of the sense of those whom he has thought fit to oppose. No Christian divines pretend, that God's proceedings towards men in this present life are unjust. On the contrary, they maintain, that it is just and wise in God, and suitable to the nature of this state of trial and discipline, to suffer things to go on as they do in their present course; and that it is agreeable to the order of things, that a state of final retribution should succeed. They are far from thinking, that what is now injustice will in a future state cease to be injustice; but they maintain, that that justice, the execution of which is for very wise reasons delayed, shall be exercised and displayed in the fittest season: that that punishment of the wicked which is not for the present inflicted, though designed, shall be executed, when it is most proper it should be so: and that reward of the righteous, which is not as yet actually conferred, shall be conferred when it is fittest it should be conferred, and when they are best prepared for receiving it. They assert, that the evils and sufferings which good men endure in this present state are perfectly consistent with the divine justice, because they are either sent as chastisements and corrections for their sins and miscarriages, or as seasonable trials for the exercise and improvement of their virtues, and to discipline them for a better world; and that in a future state the trial shall be over, and their virtue fully rewarded, and they shall arrive at the true felicity and perfection of their nature: and on the other hand, that wicked persons are here often suffered to prosper, and have

* Works, vol. v. p. 356.

† Ibid. p. 493, 494.

many advantages and benefits given them, to lead them to repentance, and to answer many wise ends of providence. And if they prove incorrigible to the methods of discipline which are here made use of, those punishments which were here deferred, shall be at length inflicted, and God's righteousness, and just detestation against sin, shall be awfully manifested and displayed.

But it is especially against future punishments that he bends his force. He observes, that "the heathen philosophers, even those of them who assumed providence to be the most active in directing the affairs of this world, were unanimous in their opinion, that the Supreme Being was never angry, or ever did harm;" for which he cites a passage from Tully's *Offices*, lib. 3. *Num iratum timemus Jovem? At hoc quidem commune est omnium philosophorum—Nunquam nec irasci Deum, nec nocere.** It will be easily allowed, that anger, strictly speaking, as it signifies a passionate emotion, such as is to be found in such imperfect creatures as we are, cannot be ascribed to God; but to deny that he is displeased or offended with the sins of his creatures, which is all that is intended, when anger is ascribed to him in the sacred writings, is really to strike at the foundation of all religion, and, under pretence of honourable thoughts of God, to banish the fear of a Deity out of the world. It was a maxim of the Epicureans concerning the divine nature,

Nec bene promeritis capitur, nec tangitur ira.

And their design in it was to deny the providence of God, and to represent him as absolutely unconcerned about the actions of men, so as neither to reward the good, nor to punish evil doers. And this, if it holdeth at all, will equally hold against God's punishing the wicked in this life, and in the next. And it looks as if this was our author's intention. He urges, that "neither reason nor experience will show us, in the Author of nature, an angry, revengeful judge, or bloody executioner."† But to miscall things does not alter their nature. It is easy to throw a hard name, and to call justice vengeance and cruelty; but no argument can be drawn from this to prove, that that which is one of the most glorious perfections, and inseparable from the wise and righteous Governor of the world, ought to pass for the worst of characters. If the Supreme Being be not utterly indifferent to virtue and vice, to good and evil, to the happiness and misery of his creatures, it must be said that he approveth the one, and is displeased with the other; and in that case he will show his approbation and displeasure by suitable effects. What should we think of an earthly prince, that should not concern himself whether his laws be observed or not, and should suffer them to be transgressed with impunity? And is this the idea we should form of the Supreme Lord of the universe? If this were the case, what could be expected but universal disorder and confusion in the moral world? It is the same thing, as if all things were left to a wild chance, without a Supreme Governor and Judge.

* Works, vol. v. p. 510.

† Ibid. p. 209.

There is a very extraordinary way of arguing which this writer makes use of to set aside future punishments. He observes, that "to assume that the divine providence towards mankind in this world has one criterion, and in the next another, would be extravagant;"* and therefore he mentions it as an absurdity in the Christian scheme, that "the proceedings of the future state shall be the very reverse of the present; for then every individual human creature is to be tried; whereas here they are only considered collectively; that the most secret actions, nay the very thoughts of the heart, will be laid open, and sentence will be pronounced accordingly."† The plain meaning of this is, that the individuals of mankind shall not be obnoxious to any punishment from God, either in this world or in the next; and consequently that there shall be no exercise of divine justice here or hereafter. For he himself declares, that "justice requires, that rewards and punishments should be measured out in various degrees, according to the various circumstances of particular cases, and in proportion to them." He has endeavoured to turn that into an argument against the Christian account of a future judgment, which is really its glory, and a great proof of its truth, viz. that men's secret actions, and even the thoughts of their hearts, shall then be laid open. These are things that lie quite out of the reach of human judicatories, and yet upon these it is that the morality of actions doth properly depend. If therefore there be no account to be given of them here or hereafter, men's best or worst actions or dispositions will go unrewarded or unpunished, which is the highest absurdity, supposing there is a Supreme moral Governor or Judge. But according to the account given us in the gospel, *the secrets of all hearts shall be revealed*, the hidden springs shall be inquired into, from whence good and evil actions flow, men shall be shown in their true characters, no real good action shall pass unrewarded, or evil one unpunished; than which nothing can possibly have a greater influence to engage us to exercise a constant care over our inward temper, and our outward conduct.

Another argument he makes use of, which, as far as it is of any force, bears against future punishments in general; it is this: that "reparation and terror are objects essential to the constitution of human justice. But what does that justice require, if it may be called justice, when it tends neither to reparation nor terror?"‡ He acknowledges, what some engaged in the same cause have thought fit to deny, that "to reform offenders is not the sole nor the principal end of punishment. Those that are capital must have some other. The criminal is executed for the sake of others, and that he may do some good by the terror of his death. The prince that should punish without regard to reparation or terror, could have no motive to punish but the pleasure of punishing; which no spirit but that of anger, vengeance, or cruelty, can inspire." He asks therefore, "what effects can punishments have, when the system of

* Works, vol. v. p. 498.

† Ibid. p. 494.

‡ Ibid. p. 494, 495.

human government is at an end, the state of probation is over, when there is no farther means for reformation of the wicked, nor reparation to the injured by those who injured them, and when the eternal lots of all mankind are cast, and terror is of no farther use? But it is to be considered, that the terror of the future punishment is of great use in this present state. The proper design of the threatenings of future punishment is not to inflict the punishment, but to prevent the wickedness, and thereby to prevent the punishment. But when once those threatenings are denounced, justice and truth, and the majesty of the Supreme Ruler, require that they should be ordinarily executed upon those who, notwithstanding those threatenings, persist in their wicked courses. For if it were laid down as a principle, that though these threatenings were denounced, justice or goodness would not suffer them to be executed, it would be the same thing as if there were no threatenings at all; since they would in that case answer no purpose, and could not be said to be so much as *in terrorem*. But besides the necessity there is that such punishments should be threatened here, for the sake of preserving order, and restraining wickedness among mankind, even in this present state, and consequently, that they should be executed hereafter upon those that have incurred the threatened penalties, of what use the execution of them may be to other orders of beings in a future state, to inspire an abhorrence of sin, and a fear of the divine majesty, and how far the influence of them may extend, no man can take upon him to determine. The Scripture intimates, as if the future judgment were to be transacted in a most solemn manner, in the view not merely of the whole human race, but of other orders of intelligent beings. Mention is often made of great numbers of angels as present on that occasion. Those punishments may therefore be of very extensive use, for any thing that can be proved to the contrary, for promoting the general good, for displaying the evil of sin, and vindicating the majesty of the divine laws and government, and may serve as solemn warnings to the intellectual creation. God takes no pleasure in their torments, as such, but in answering the great ends of his government, in taking the properest methods to promote the good of the whole, in the exercise and display of his own infinite righteousness and purity, in separating the just from the unjust, and putting a visible eternal discrimination between the obstinate opposers of his authority and goodness, and those who loved and served him in sincerity.

When this writer reckoneth *reparation* among the ends of punishment, he seemeth by reparation to mean only the repairing the injuries done by one creature to another; as if all the malignity and demerit of sin consisted only in its being a wrong done to our fellow creatures; and as if it were not to be considered or punished at all as an offence against the divine majesty, and a violation of the laws of the supreme universal Lord. But this is a great mistake. Sin is indeed a great evil, considered as an offence committed

against our fellow-creatures, and against the true dignity, perfection, and happiness of our own natures, and a counteracting the proper end and order of our beings; but the principal part of its malignity is its being an insurrection against the majesty and authority of the great Lord of the universe, to whom we owe all possible subjection and obedience, an opposing our wills and appetites to the will and law of the Supreme, the basest ingratitude to his infinite goodness, a casting an indignity on his adorable perfections, and on the wisdom and righteousness of his government, and therefore a breach of universal order. This is what renders sin principally criminal and odious, and what we ought to have a chief regard to in our humble confessions, or else we are not true penitents. And as it is in this that its malignity chiefly consisteth, and as God would have us abhor it principally on this account, so it is on this account especially that he punisheth it: for he judgeth of things as they really are. If the greatest evil of sin consisteth in its being an offence committed against the divine majesty, a wilful transgression of his known laws, and an opposition to his authority and goodness; if the more there is of this in any sin, the more heinous its guilt must be acknowledged to be; if this carrieth an infinitely greater, a more monstrous malignity in it, than its being merely an offence against creatures like ourselves; it is contrary to all the dictates of reason and good sense to suppose, that the most wise and righteous Governor of the world, in punishing sin, hath not principally a regard to that, on the account of which it principally deserveth punishment. It is true that God cannot be really hurt by our sins and vices, nor beatified by our obedience and our virtues. But this is only owing to the transcendent excellence of his own most perfect nature. And it would be a strange thing to make the infinite perfection of his nature a reason why his creatures should be allowed to transgress his laws with impunity. On the contrary, the greater the excellency of his nature is, the greater is the evil of sin as committed against his infinite majesty; and that very perfection of his nature makes it impossible for him not to hate all moral evil. For it is manifest, that an eternal love of order, purity and righteousness, is necessarily included in infinite perfection. And how shall he show his just abhorrence of sin, and aversion to the breach of moral order, but by the marks and effects of his displeasure against it, that is, by punishing obstinate presumptuous transgressors?

Our author tells us, that "future punishments were not believed by the philosophers, not even by Plato and Pythagoras, though they talked of them."* And that "at the coming of our Saviour they were general disregarded even by the vulgar." If this were so, it became the more necessary to renew the discovery, and set it in a clearer and stronger light, since it was of vast importance to mankind to believe it. By his own acknowledgment, the ablest philosophers and legislators thought so. And he himself frequently

* Works, vol. v. p. 513.

owns the great usefulness of this doctrine. And its usefulness is, as I have before observed, in conjunction with other considerations, no small argument of its truth.

Having considered what he hath offered with relation to future rewards and punishments in general, I shall now examine the particular objections he hath urged against the accounts given of them in the Christian revelation.

He observes, that "had the doctrine of future rewards and punishments been more general, and less descriptive; had future punishments been represented like the rewards, to be simply such as eye never saw, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man could conceive, it might have been maintained in credit, and have had an universal and real influence—perhaps to the great advantage of religion. But besides the absurdity of supposing that God inflicts eternal punishments on his creatures, which would render their non-existence infinitely preferable to their existence on the whole;" he apprehends that "an air of ridicule has been cast on this doctrine by preserving all the idle tales and burlesque images, which were propagated in those days." He represents it as "nearly resembling the *mythologia de inferis*, which has been so often laughed at."* As to the account given us in the gospel of the future reward, it is incomparably noble and excellent, and not quite so general as he represents it, but such as is fitted to raise in us the highest ideas of the felicity and perfection to which good men shall be raised in the heavenly world. The descriptions there set before us of future punishments are general, but very expressive. And the burlesque images he speaks of are awful and striking representations, designed and fitted to convey images of terror, but not mixed with any trifling or ridiculous circumstances, like the poetical tales and fables he refers to.

But what he seems to lay a principal stress upon, for exposing the Christian doctrine of future rewards and punishments, is this: that "justice requires most certainly that rewards and punishments should be measured out in every particular case, in proportion to the merit and demerit of each individual. But instead of this, it is assured, that the righteous and the wicked are transported into heaven, or plunged into hell, without any distinction of the particular cases which have been so solemnly determined, and without any proportion observed between the various degrees of merit and demerit in the application of those rewards and punishments."† And in all that he offers in the latter part of the sixty-eighth of his *Fragments and Essays*, he proceeds upon this supposition, that "the greatest and least degree of virtue shall be rewarded, and the greatest and least degree of vice punished alike:" And that it is "arbitrary and tyrannical to make no distinction of persons in dissimilar cases."‡ And again he urges, that "the hypothesis of all being saved alike, or damned in the lump, tends to destroy little by little

* Works, vol. v. p. 542.

† Ibid. p. 495.

‡ Ibid. p. 496.

all those impressions which the belief of a future state is so usefully designed to give."*

All that his Lordship here offers depends upon a great misapprehension, or a wilful misrepresentation of the Christian doctrine on this head. If men were to be rewarded and punished hereafter only collectively, and no regard had to individuals, which our author would persuade us is the method of God's proceedings towards mankind in this present state, then it might be admitted that men are saved and damned only *in the lump*, as he is pleased to express it. But this is not the Scripture representation of God's proceedings in a future state. We are there most expressly assured, that the case of every individual shall be examined and judged. It is thus that our Lord, who is to be our judge, represents it: he tells us, that he will *come in his glory, and all his holy angels with him, and then shall he reward every man according to his works*, Mat. xvi. 27. St. Paul expressly declares, that *God will render to every man according to his deeds*, Rom. ii. 6. That *every one of us shall give an account of himself to God*, Rom. xiv. 12. That *we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad*, 2 Cor. v. 10. That *every man's work shall be tried, and made manifest*, 1 Cor. iii. 13. In speaking of the respective duties of masters and servants, he lets them know, that the meanest shall not be neglected, but shall receive a proper reward: That *whatsoever good thing a man doth, the same shall he receive of the Lord, whether he be bond or free: but he that doeth wrong, shall receive for the wrong which he hath done, and there is no respect of persons*, Eph. vi. 8. 9. Col. iii. 25. St. Peter assureth us, that *God without respect of persons judgeth according to every man's work*, 1 Pet. i. 17. Christ is introduced as declaring, *I am he which searcheth the reins and hearts; and I will give unto every one of you according to your works*, Rev. ii. 23. And in the description of the future judgment, Rev. xx. 12. to show the exactness of that judgment, it is said, that *the books were opened, and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books according to their works*. And it is repeated again, ver. 13. *they were judged, every man according to their works*.

From these several passages compared together, it appears with the utmost evidence, that according to the whole tenor of the New Testament, in the dispensing future retributions, *the rewards and punishments shall be measured out in every particular case, in proportion to the merit and demerit of each individual*, which our author saith is what justice requires. It is therefore manifest, that what is there said concerning that future state of rewards and punishments, must be understood in a consistency with the making an exact distribution according to particular cases and circumstances; and that the general representations there made of heaven as a state of future

* Works, vol. v. p. 503.

happiness to the righteous, and of hell as a state of future punishment to the wicked, must be so taken and explained as to comport with the different degrees of rewards and punishments to the one and to the other; and not as if all men were to be raised to the same degree of future glory and happiness; and all bad men to be punished with the same degree of misery; since it is so frequently and expressly declared, that God will then, without respect of persons, render to every man according to his deeds; and that every man shall then receive according to what he hath done in the body. The general descriptions of that future glory are indeed sublime and noble, and represent it in a most attractive view. And it was proper it should be so. They set before us a happiness beyond imagination great and glorious, the more effectually to animate us to a patient continuance in well-doing. And it is signified, that it is of such a nature, so transcendently great and excellent, as vastly to exceed what any of the human race could in strictness of justice have deserved. For the obedience of the best of men is very imperfect, and mixed with many defects; and therefore that eternal life and happiness is represented as the *gift of God, through Jesus Christ*. That reward is the effect of free sovereign grace and goodness. And therefore none can find fault, if the glory and happiness which shall be conferred upon good men hereafter be above what they could be said to have strictly merited. But though the very lowest degree of reward and happiness in that future state shall be far superior to what the best of men could have pretended to have challenged, as in strictness of justice due to his merits, yet God shall so order it, in his infinite wisdom and righteousness, that there shall be an admirable proportion observed in giving different degrees of glory, according to the different proficiencies men had made in real goodness during their state of trial. Nothing can be clearer to this purpose than our Saviour's determination, in the parable of the pounds, Luke xix. 12. 20. where he represents higher honours and rewards conferred upon some than upon others, according to their different degrees of usefulness, and the different improvements they had made of what was committed to them. And in the blessings he pronounceth upon those that are persecuted for righteousness sake, he plainly intimates, that they should be distinguished with a higher reward in heaven than many others, in proportion to their greater sufferings and services. And in general he declares, that in *his Father's house are many mansions*; which supposes that there shall be different abodes provided for good men in that future world, into which they shall be distributed, each of them happy in their several ways, and each contented with the lot assigned them. But no-where are we particularly told, what shall be the lowest degree of happiness and reward which shall be conferred on the lowest degrees of real virtue and righteousness, nor would such a discovery be of any use to mankind, or answer any valuable purpose.

As to future punishments, in the inflicting of these the strictest regard shall be had to the rules of justice, so that no man shall be

punished beyond his demerits. This incontestably follows from the frequent declarations that are made, and which have been already produced, that God will render to every man according to his deeds, without respect of persons. But besides these general declarations, there are several passages of Scripture which are designed to show, that there shall be a remarkable difference made between some bad men and others in the punishments inflicted on them; and that in the inflicting these punishments, a regard shall be had to the different aggravations of their crimes. This is what our Lord plainly signifies, when he declares with great solemnity, that it *shall be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment*, that is, for the most profligate parts of the heathen world, than for those that obstinately rejected and abused the gospel offers of mercy and salvation, and who go on in an obstinate course of presumptuous sin and disobedience, in opposition to the clearest light and most glorious advantages. And again, he declares, that *that servant which knew his Lord's will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. But he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes. For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall much be required: and to whom men have committed much, of him will they ask the more*, Luke xii. 47. 48. Nothing can be plainer than it is from this representation, that among those who shall be punished in a future state, great difference shall be made in the degrees of punishment inflicted on them, according to their different demerits; and that an exact consideration shall be had of their several cases, and an equitable proportion shall be observed, and all proper allowances made. The general descriptions therefore of these future punishments are to be interpreted in a consistency with supposing a very great difference made between some and others in the degrees of their punishment. In these general descriptions, the strongest images of terror are made use of, and it is highly proper it should be so. The punishments are described in their highest degree, as they shall be inflicted on the most obstinate and heinous offenders. No-where are we particularly told what shall be the lowest degree of punishment which shall be inflicted in that future world; nor what that state of vice and guilt is which shall subject men to the least punishment. Such declarations could answer no good end, and would probably be abused. It is more wisely done to leave that matter in general expressions; at the same time assuring us, that every man shall be punished in a strict proportion to the circumstances of his crime.

A due consideration of this will in a great measure obviate the principal objections this author hath urged against the eternal duration of that future punishment, which depend principally upon this supposition, that all shall be alike subjected to the most extreme degree of torment and misery, and so shall continue for ever: whereas, if it be considered, that there shall be a great difference made between some and others, in that future world; that the state of some shall be tolerable, compared with that of others; and that

every man's case shall be considered, and his condition wisely and exactly proportioned to what he had deserved ; on this supposition, whatever the duration of it is supposed to be, it is still just.

Here it will not be improper to take notice of a remarkable passage of this writer in relation to this present subject. He says, "he could easily persuade himself, that the mercy of God pardons the offenders who amend, consistently with his justice ; for else, as all men offend, all men would be punished ; and that his goodness may carry on the work his mercy has begun, and place such as are the objects of both in a state where they will be exempt perhaps eternally from all natural, and, as much as finite creatures can be, from all moral evil. He could persuade himself, that they who are the objects of neither, and are not therefore pardoned, remain, if they do remain, excluded from the happiness of the others, and reduced to a forlorn state. Some such hypothesis, where no certainty is to be had, I could admit," says he, "as probable, because it contradicts none of the divine attributes, sets none of them at variance, nor breaks their harmony." Here he supposes it to be a probable hypothesis, and perfectly consistent with the divine attributes, not only that some men, who are the proper objects of the divine goodness and mercy, may continue eternally in a happy state exempt from all evil ; but that others, who by their conduct have rendered themselves not the proper objects of the divine mercy, may be debarred from pardon, and may remain, whilst they do remain, and consequently may remain eternally, supposing them to continue in eternal existence, excluded from that happiness which the others enjoy, and reduced to a forlorn state. If therefore we be assured by a well-attested revelation, that this shall really be the case, he ought not to object against it.

But he urges, that "it is absurd to suppose, that our state of probation ends with this present life, and that judgment will be determined by what we have done in this state.—And that a virtue or wickedness of fifty or sixty years, should be rewarded with eternal happiness, or punished with eternal misery."* The objection that is drawn from the disproportion there is between the duration of the state of trial, and the eternity that is to succeed it, might be made, whatever we suppose the continuance of the time of trial to be. But the shortness of this state of trial furnisheth a powerful consideration to engage us to improve it. And very probably, if it were ordinarily much longer than it is, the condition of mankind might be worse, in the present corrupt state of the human nature, than it now is ; as the length of men's lives before the flood probably contributed to the wickedness that so much abounded. The argument, therefore, as far as there is any weight in it, holdeth against the supposing any state of trial at all, of whatever continuance. But do we know enough of the measures and designs of the divine government, to be able to pronounce, that it may not be worthy of

* Works, vol. v. p. 493, 504, 505.

God, as the Supreme Governor of the world, to appoint to his reasonable creatures a state of trial and discipline, and to deal with them according to their behaviour in such a state, and let them know, that if they obstinately persist in their rebellion and disobedience, he will at length shut up his grace from them, and they shall be excluded from that glory and felicity, with which he would have bountifully rewarded their perseverance in a course of piety and virtue during the time of trial allotted them? It may be left to impartial reason, whether this constitution would not be more wisely ordained, and more likely to promote the interests of virtue and good order in the world, and to repress vice and wickedness, than to set no bounds at all to the offers of his mercy, and to assure them, that let them behave ever so wickedly and presumptuously, and abuse and reject all the methods of his grace, yet still after they leave this world, and at any other time throughout eternity, whenever they repent, they shall be forgiven, and even restored to favour, and raised to glory and felicity? Would this be a rule of government worthy of the divine wisdom, or fit to be published throughout the whole intellectual world?

As reason leads us to conclude, that it is necessary, for answering the great ends of moral government, that punishments should be denounced against the obstinate transgressors of the divine laws, so it may be justly doubted whether to creatures designed for an immortal existence, the threatening of none but temporary punishments would be sufficient; especially if they apprehended that they should outlive those punishments for infinite ages in bliss and glory. It certainly becometh us, in our inquiries concerning such matters as these, to proceed with great modesty, since we cannot pretend of ourselves, to be proper judges of what the governing wisdom and righteousness of the Supreme Lord of the universe doth require, and what is most worthy of God, and most for the good of the whole, which is of far greater importance than the interests of particular beings.

To consider the sentence which shall pass upon bad men at the great day of judgment, as final and irreversible; and that after this there shall be no fresh offers of grace and mercy, but they shall continue under the effects of that sentence during the whole of their existence; is certainly a consideration of the highest moment, and must needs have a wonderful weight to engage us to make the best use of the present state of trial allotted us, and to lay hold on the offers of salvation that are now made to us upon the reasonable terms of the new covenant. Whereas if we had reason to apprehend, that there were to be new states of trial, new seasons and offers of grace, after the general judgment, it would greatly weaken the influence of the motives drawn from the threatenings of future punishment. Nor is there any thing in this constitution which can be proved to be inconsistent with the wisdom, justice, and equity of the divine government. For as to the exclusion from the heavenly felicity, which shall be a considerable part of that future punishment, there is no reasonable ground for expecting, that those who

now reject the divine grace and mercy should ever be admitted to that transcendent bliss and glory, which God hath been pleased of his own free and rich goodness to promise to the righteous, and which no man could pretend to challenge as in strictness of justice due to him. Nor is it any impeachment of the divine wisdom and goodness to leave obstinate sinners during the whole course of their existence under that part of the punishment which ariseth from the stinging reflections of their own guilty consciences, or from the natural effects of their wickedness and bad temper of mind. And whatever farther punishments there may be more directly and immediately inflicted by the divine hand, we may be sure they shall be in such measures and proportions to each individual, as never to exceed the demerit of their crimes.

What has been said may help us to judge of the strange representation this author is pleased to make of the Scripture doctrine of future punishments: That "such a proceeding can be ascribed to no principle, but to the revenge of a being, who punishes to the full extent of his power, and merely for the pleasure of punishing, and without any regard to justice, creatures who did not offend him, merely for the pleasure of offending him; creatures who had free-will, and made wrong elections; creatures who might plead, in mitigation of their punishments, their frailties, their passions, the imperfections of their natures, and the numerous temptations to which they stood exposed."* This representation is unjust in every article. The tendency of it is plainly this: to apologize for sin, and to diminish the evil of it. And what good can be proposed by this, it is hard to say. Nothing can be more contrary to the honour of God, to the good of mankind, to the peace and order of the moral world, than to endeavour to make men entertain slight thoughts of the evil of sin. To what purpose is it to say, that sinners do not offend God merely for the pleasure of offending him? If they do it for the pleasure of gratifying their own corrupt inclinations and appetites, which they oppose and prefer to the most wise and holy will and law of the sovereign Lord of the universe, is not this a very heinous guilt? Their having free-will, and making wrong elections, when it was in their choice to have done otherwise, though mentioned here in mitigation of their guilt, is a great aggravation of their crime, and an abuse of their reason and liberty which are amongst the noblest gifts of God. To plead passions and temptations, is an excuse, which, if admitted, may serve to apologize for the greatest crimes. But they are not allowed by any wise human judicatories as a reason for exempting those that transgress the laws from the penalties to which their transgressions had exposed them. And Lord Bolingbroke himself has elsewhere very properly observed, that those very persons who pretend that inclinations cannot be restrained, and who speak most of the power of the appetites and passions, can resist and control them, when any evident in-

* Works, vol. v. p. 518.

terest, or contrary inclination, leads them to do so.* And as to any transgressions that may properly be called frailties and infirmities, and which have little of the will in them, the wise and just Ruler of the world will no doubt make all the allowances that equity can demand.

Upon the whole, the Christian doctrine of future rewards and punishments is so far from furnishing a just objection against the divine original of the gospel revelation, that, if rightly considered, it yieldeth a noble evidence of its usefulness and truth. It is scarce possible to form an idea of any thing more solemn and affecting, and better fitted to make a strong impression on the human mind, than the representation given in the New Testament of the future judgment. The whole human race convened before the sovereign universal Judge, innumerable myriads of holy angels attending, the judicial process carried on with the greatest solemnity, a strict and impartial inquiry made, the most hidden actions brought to light, and the very secrets of the heart laid open, and all followed by eternal retributions. It seemeth plain from our Saviour's manner of representing things, that he regarded it as a matter of great importance, that sinners should have no hope or expectation given them of obtaining mercy and salvation, if they persisted to the end of this present life in a course of impenitence, presumptuous sin, and disobedience. He nowhere giveth the least intimation, that the punishment of the wicked in a future state shall have an end. On the contrary, he still speaketh of it in terms, which, according to the natural import of the expressions, seem to signify that it shall be of a perpetual duration, without adding any thing to qualify those expressions. And for any persons to flatter themselves, that God may in his absolute sovereignty dispense with the rigour of his threatenings, and to depend upon such an expectation, would be an extreme folly, when the plain tenor of the revelation seems to go the other way.

I have now finished the design I had in view, which was to defend natural and revealed religion against the attacks made upon both by this very confident and assuming author. In the execution of this design, I have principally confined myself to the reasoning part of his Lordship's works, as far as religion is concerned, and have not willingly overlooked any thing that had the appearance of argument. But I have not attempted to follow him in several of those excursions which seem to have been principally intended to show the variety of his reading, of which it must be owned there is a great appearance, though I cannot say he has given many proofs of his having maturely digested it. Several things there are in his scheme of metaphysics, and in the account he has given of the sentiments of the ancient philosophers, which might be justly animadverted upon, though it will not be denied that some of his observations on these heads are just and curious. But as a distinct examination of them would have very much enlarged this work, which is

* See his Letters on the Study and Use of History, let. iii. sect. 1.

already longer than I at first intended, or than I would have wished it to be, I have chosen to omit them: for the same reason I have taken no particular notice of the reflections he has occasionally cast upon the ancient fathers of the Christian Church, and upon the body of the primitive Christians,* of whom he has made a most injurious representation, and has in effect justified the persecutions raised by the heathens against them. He tells us, that "their clergy were, under pretence of religion, a very lawless tribe.—That they broke the laws in the most public manner, and instigated others to break them, by popular insurrections against the authority of magistrates, and by tumults and riots, in which they insulted the established religion of the empire.—And he believes the list of the martyrs consisted more of those who suffered for breaking the peace, than of those who suffered quietly for the sake of their religion."† Such is the charge he has thought fit to bring against a worthy and peaceable body of men (for so the primitive Christians generally were); whose innocent and virtuous behaviour has been acknowledged by some of their pagan adversaries themselves.

You will observe, that I have, for the most part, except where the argument led to it, passed over the bitter sarcasms he so frequently throws out against the Christian divines. They have the honour to be reviled and insulted in every work that is designed against revealed religion. But it must be owned, that his Lordship has in obloquy and reproach far exceeded all that have gone before him. He has found out, what the world did not know before, that the divines are in a formed alliance and confederacy with the atheists against God and his providence, and that the latter are not such dangerous enemies to religion as the former.

I have not thought myself obliged to take any distinct notice of the long account he has given in his fourth essay, of the encroachments of the ecclesiastical upon the civil power, and the several

* As a specimen how ready our author is to lay hold of the slightest appearances for casting a slur upon the ancient fathers and primitive Christians, I would observe, that after mentioning the Gnostics, and their pretences, he adds, that "the orthodox grew in time as much Gnostics as others; and we see that the church of Alexandria thought it necessary to be so, in order to be truly religious."‡ He is so fond of this thought, that he afterwards repeateth it, and talks of the "heretics assuming the pompous title of Gnostics, and despising the first preachers of Christianity, as ignorant and illiterate men: and that Clement of Alexandria maintained, that to be a good Christian it was necessary to be a good Gnostic."† It would be hard to produce an instance of greater disingenuity than Lord Bolingbroke is here guilty of, and it can scarcely be supposed that he was so ignorant as not to be sensible of it. The word Gnostic properly signifies a man of knowledge. Some corrupters of Christianity in the primitive times, who made high pretences to extraordinary knowledge, assumed that title to themselves. And because Clement describes the true Gnostics in opposition to the false, to show that this name, in which those heretics gloried, belonged in its just sense only to the true Christian; therefore he and the orthodox Christians were Gnostics, i. e. of the same principles and practices with that sect which they condemned. It may be safely left to the reader to judge of the fairness of such a conduct.

• Works, vol. iv. p. 336.

† Ibid. p. 458.

‡ Works, vol. iv. p. 434.

steps by which those encroachments were carried on, especially in the times of the papal usurpation. He has advanced little on these heads that can be called new, or which had not been observed by others before him. And we have his Lordship's own acknowledgment frequently repeated, that this is by no means chargeable on true original Christianity. It would therefore be very disingenuous, to turn that to the disadvantage of the religion of Jesus, which has been only owing to a gross abuse and corruption of it, a corruption which was plainly foretold in the sacred writings, at a time when it was impossible for any human sagacity to foresee it.

He frequently exclaims against artificial theology, and complains of the profane mixtures which have been brought into the Christian religion, by the subtilties of a vain philosophy, and by idle traditions. It must be acknowledged, that there has often been too much ground for such complaints. And to endeavour to separate pure uncorrupted Christianity, as taught by Christ and his apostles, from debasing mixtures and the corrupt additions that have been made to it, is undoubtedly a noble and useful work, and, when properly performed, is doing a real service to Christianity, and tendeth to establish the credit of it, and to promote its sacred interests. But such writers as Lord Bolingbroke are certainly the unfittest persons in the world to undertake it:

*Non tali auxilio, nec defensoribus istis,
Tempus eget.*

Instead of promoting the good work of reformation, and of contributing to restore religion in its primitive purity, they bring a disgrace upon those who would in good earnest attempt it, and furnish the patrons of those corruptions with a plausible pretence for reproaching and misrepresenting such persons, as having an ill intention against Christianity itself, and as serving the cause of deists and infidels.

His Lordship charges the mischiefs which have befallen the Christian Church as having been chiefly owing to this: that "the pure word of God neither is nor has been the sole criterion of orthodoxy."* He asserts, that "no human authority can supply or alter, much less improve, what the Son of God came on earth to reveal."† He says, that "divines should return to the Gospel, as philosophers have returned to Nature, and presume to dogmatize no farther than the plain import of it will justify."‡ And here he recommends it as the most effectual way to remove the scandals arising from the dissensions among Christians, that the Christian divines "should be content to explain what they understand, to adore what they understand not, and to leave in mystery all that Christ and his apostles have left so."§

* Works, vol. iv. p. 448.

† Ibid. p. 627.
§ Ibid. p. 629.

‡ Ibid. p. 449.

These advices, considered in themselves, might have been thought to proceed from a good and friendly intention. But every thing is suspected that comes from such a hand. Yet a real friend to Christianity will know how to make a proper use of admonitions and reproofs, even when given by an enemy.

I shall conclude with this observation: that the religion of Jesus, as delivered in the New Testament in its original purity and simplicity, will be ever able to stand its ground against all the assaults of the most subtle and most malicious adversaries. It hath a dignity and excellence in it, which hath often extorted favourable acknowledgments even from those who have appeared to be strongly prejudiced against it, of which we have a remarkable instance in the late Lord Bolingbroke. And I am persuaded, that the more any thinking man considereth it with a free and unprejudiced mind, the more he will admire it, and will be the more convinced of its truth and excellence, and of its divine original. You will, I doubt not, join with me in earnest prayer to God, that this holy religion may be more universally diffused, that it may be made known to those who know it not, and that where it is known and professed, it may have more of the happy effects which it is so well fitted to produce.

I am,

Reverend and dear Sir,

Most sincerely and affectionately yours,

JOHN LELAND.

LETTER XXXIV.

SIR,

THE foregoing Letter finished the observations I had made on Lord Bolingbroke's posthumous works. In the course of those observations, I had occasion to make some references to a small treatise I had published before, intituled, *Reflections on the late Lord Bolingbroke's Letters on the Study and Use of History*, which was the first of his Lordship's writings in which he had appeared in an avowed opposition to the Christian cause. And it having been thought proper to reprint those Reflections, I was advised by you and other friends to insert them in the *Supplement to the View of the Deistical Writers*, lately published, as they bear a near affinity to

the subjects there treated of, and might render that part which relates to Lord Bolingbroke more complete. For the same reasons these Reflections are retained in this new edition of the *View of the Deistical Writers*, and are here subjoined to the observations on the late Lord Bolingbroke's posthumous works. But whereas in the two first editions of those Reflections, besides the remarks which were made upon those passages in his Lordship's Letters that relate to Christianity and the holy Scriptures, there were several things added of a political nature, and which were designed to examine and detect his Lordship's misrepresentations; in the third, fourth, and this edition, it was thought proper not to intermix any thing of a *political nature*, which would not be so well suited to the design of the present work. For this reason, whereas in the first and second editions of these Reflections, it was proposed to distribute the remarks into three heads, the third of which related to the severe reflections Lord Bolingbroke had made upon the consequences of the late revolution, and the state of things under the present establishment; this third head, which in those editions reached from p. 133 to p. 166, is omitted. But there are additions and improvements made in other parts of these Reflections; the most considerable of which relates to the *curse pronounced by Noah upon Canaan*, which, in the opinion of some judicious friends, was not so fully considered before as it ought to have been.

This addition was drawn up, as you know, some time ago, and sent over in order to be inserted in the new edition of these Reflections, before I saw Dr. Newton's accurate dissertation on this subject, in his excellent *Dissertations upon Prophecy*, which came but very lately into my hands. It will now probably be thought not so necessary; but I have chosen to let it stand as it was first drawn up, because it may possibly not be without its use, and will tend to render the *Reflections on Lord Bolingbroke's Letters on the Study and Use of History* more complete. The method I have pursued is something different from Dr. Newton's. He seems to incline to think there is a defect in the *Hebrew copies*. But I choose to defend the passage according to the present reading of the *Hebrew copies*, which is followed by almost all the ancient versions, as well as by our own translators.

The Preface to the Reflections is somewhat long; but it was not thought proper to omit it, as it contains several things, which, in the opinion of some whose judgment I regard, may be as useful as any part of those Reflections.

REFLECTIONS
ON THE
LATE LORD BOLINGBROKE'S LETTERS,
ON THE
STUDY AND USE OF HISTORY ;
ESPECIALLY SO FAR AS THEY RELATE TO CHRISTIANITY,
AND THE HOLY SCRIPTURES.

These "Reflections" were first published in the Year 1753, and before any part of this "View of the Deistical Writers" was written.

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P R E F A C E.

ALTHOUGH no man needs to make an apology for using his best endeavours in defence of our common Christianity, when it is openly attacked; yet as my engaging again in this cause, after having done it on some former occasions, might have an appearance of too much forwardness, it was with some reluctance that I was persuaded to undertake it. What had great weight with me, was the judgment and advice of a person of great worth,* of whose sincere friendship I have had many proofs, and whom I greatly honour for his truly Christian and candid spirit, as well as his zeal for our holy religion. He urged, that it was highly proper to take notice of the contempt and abuse attempted to be thrown upon Christianity and the holy Scriptures, by a writer of so great name, and whose specious insinuations, and confident assertions, might probably make disadvantageous impressions upon minds too well prepared to receive them. And, as he had not then heard that any other had undertaken it, or intended to do so, he thought my drawing up Remarks on these Letters, which had made so much noise, might be of some use. This determined me to attempt it; and how far what is now offered is fitted to answer the intention, must be submitted to the judgment of the public. I am sensible of the disadvantage one is under in appearing against a writer of so distinguished a character as the late Lord Viscount Bolingbroke. His Lordship's admirers will no doubt expect, that a proper decent respect should be paid to his great abilities and talents, as well as quality. This I readily acknowledge: but there is certainly a still greater regard due to the honour of Christianity, which he hath unworthily insulted. However, it is hoped the reader will find, that care has been taken not to transgress the rules of decency, or to push the charge against him farther than his own words give just ground for; and that angry and reproachful expressions have not been made use of, even where there seemed to be a sufficient provocation given.

It might have been expected, from a person of his Lordship's genius, and who seems fond of saying things which had not been insisted upon before, that when he thought fit to appear against the authority of the holy Scriptures, and the Christian religion, he would have managed the argument in a different manner, and to greater advantage, than had been done by others in the same cause before him. But I do not find, that, with all his sagacity and penetration, he hath advanced any thing on the argument, that can be properly called a new discovery; or that he hath given any additional force to the objections which have been urged by others, and to which sufficient answers have been made.

In that part of his Letters, in which he attempteth to expose the Scripture history as false and uncertain, there are several things

* The Rev. Dr. Thomas Wilson, Rector of Walbrook, and Prebendary of Westminster.

thrown in, which seem rather calculated to show his Lordship's reading, than to answer the main design he appears to have had in view. It would be no difficult matter to point to some mistakes and inaccuracies he hath fallen into. But I have chosen for the most part to pass them by, and confine myself to those things that have a nearer relation to the argument.

Any one that is conversant with those that are called the Deistical Writers, must have observed, that it is very usual for them to put on an appearance of respect for Christianity, at the same time that they do all in their power to subvert it. In this his Lordship hath thought fit to imitate them.

He hath sometimes expressed a seeming regard for the holy Scriptures; and hath carried it so far as to make a show of owning the divine inspiration of some parts of them. But I believe he would have been loath to have had it thought, that he was in earnest. It is not easy to see the justice, or even the good sense, of such a conduct; since the disguise is too thin to impose upon the most unwary reader; nor can I see what end it can answer, but to give one no very good opinion of the writer's sincerity.

This justice, however, must be done to the noble author, that he hath brought the controversy, relating to the divine authority of the Christian religion, into a narrower compass than some others engaged in the same cause have seemed willing to do. He asserteth, that Christianity is a religion founded upon facts; and fairly acknowledgeth that if the facts can be proved to be true, the divine original and authority of the Christian religion are established. And what he requireth is, that these facts should be proved, as all other past facts, that are judged worthy of credit, are proved, viz. by good historical evidence. This bringeth the controversy to a short issue: for if it can be shown, that the great important facts, recorded in the evangelical writings, have been transmitted to us with as much evidence as could be reasonably expected, supposing those facts to have been really done; then, by his Lordship's concessions, and according to his own way of stating the case, they are to be received as true; and consequently the Christian religion is of divine authority.

His Lordship had too much sense to deny (as some have been willing to do) the certainty of all historical evidence as to past facts, or to insist upon ocular demonstration for things done in former ages. Since therefore the best way of knowing and being assured of past facts is, by authentic accounts, written and published in the age in which the facts were done; all that properly remains is, to prove the credibility and authenticity of the gospel-records; and that they have been transmitted to us with such a degree of evidence, as may be safely depended upon. And notwithstanding what his Lordship hath insinuated to the contrary, this hath been often done with great clearness and force, by the writers that have appeared on the behalf of Christianity. What is offered in this way in the following Reflections, will, I hope, be judged sufficient; though I have done little more than point to the heads of things, which might easily

have been enlarged upon, if I had not been afraid of swelling these Reflections to too great a bulk.

The chief danger to be apprehended from his Lordship's book, appears to me to arise from the contemptuous insinuation he has thrown out against Christianity, as if it could not bear the light, or stand the test of an impartial enquiry, and as if every man of sense that examines into first principles without prejudice, must immediately see through the delusion. This, from a man of his Lordship's known abilities, and fine taste, may be apt to do mischief among those, who, without any uncommon abilities, or giving themselves the trouble of much thinking, yet want to pass for persons of extraordinary penetration, and raised above vulgar prejudices. But if authority were to decide this cause, it were easy to produce, on the side of Christianity, many great names of persons, whose learning and good sense, and eminent merit, are universally acknowledged. I shall not mention any of the clergy on this occasion, because they might perhaps be excepted against: though, if extensive knowledge and learning, if depth of thought and exactness of judgment, if great candour and probity of manners, or if fineness of genius, and elegance of taste in polite literature, might recommend them as fit to judge in these matters, many of them might be named, so confessedly eminent in all these respects, as would render them ornaments to any profession in the world. But it may not be improper to mention some illustrious Laymen, who have either professedly written in defence of Christianity, and the holy Scriptures, or have, in their writings, shown an high esteem and veneration for them. Of foreigners, among many that might be mentioned to advantage, I shall only take notice of the Lord Du Plessis Mornay, who was both a very wise statesman, and eminently learned; the celebrated M. Pascal, one of the finest writers, and greatest geniuses of the last age; that extraordinary man, Grotius, not easily to be paralleled for force and extent of genius, as well as variety of learning; those great men, the Barons Puffendorf and Ezekiel Spanheim, the former deservedly admired for his great knowledge of the law of nature and nations, the latter peculiarly eminent for his acquaintance with the *Belles Lettres*, and refined taste in the politer parts of learning. To these might be added many excellent persons of our own nation, such as Lord Bacon, Mr. Selden, Sir Charles Wolsely, Sir Matthew Hale, the honourable Robert Boyle, Mr. Locke, Sir Isaac Newton, Mr. Addison, Mr. Forbes the late Lord President of Scotland. I believe there are few but would think it an honour to be ranked with these illustrious names, some of them remarkable for their eminent station and figure in the world, and great political abilities; and all of them justly admired for the extent of their learning and knowledge, the solidity of their judgment, or correctness of their taste. And I cannot help, on this occasion, mentioning two gentlemen (the latter lately deceased) of acknowledged learning and fine sense, who have distinguished themselves by their writings in defence of Christianity, Sir George Lyttleton and Mr. West.

No man needs therefore be apprehensive as if his appearing to show a zeal for Christianity might be looked upon as a reflection upon his understanding, or as a mark of a narrow and bigoted way of thinking; since it cannot be denied, that some of the wisest men, the greatest geniuses, and exactest reasoners of the age, have been persons that professed an high regard for the Christian religion. And the same might, I doubt not, be said of numbers of gentlemen now living, of eminent abilities, and distinguished worth, who might be mentioned with great honour, though they have had no occasion of appearing in the world as writers. But the controversy is not to be decided by the authority of great names. Christianity does not stand in need of that support. It standeth fixed on its own solid basis, and only requireth to be considered with an attention suitable to its vast importance. It hath nothing to fear from a true freedom of thought, from deep reasoning, and impartial enquiry. What it hath most to apprehend, is a thoughtless levity and inattention of mind, and an absolute indifference to all religion, and to all enquiries about it. It is no easy matter to prevail with those to think closely in such a case as this, who are under the power of sensual affections and appetites, who are sunk in indolence and a love of ease, or carried off with a perpetual hurry of diversions and amusements, or engaged in the warm pursuits of ambition or avarice. But surely, if the voice of reason is to be heard, and if there be any thing at all that deserveth a serious attention, it is this. The enquiry whether Christianity be true, and of a divine original, or not, is a matter of high importance, and upon which a great deal dependeth. The gospel itself most certainly representeth it so. If Christianity be true and divine, those to whom it is published, and who have an opportunity of enquiring into it, and yet neglect to do so, can never be able to justify their conduct to the great Ruler and Judge of the world. It cannot with any consistency be supposed, that if God hath sent his Son into the world, to bring a clear revelation of his will, and to guide men in the way of salvation, it is a matter of indifference whether those to whom it is offered, and made known, pay any regard to this signification of the divine will, or not, or comply with the terms which are there prescribed. And therefore for such persons to reject it at a venture, without giving themselves the trouble of a serious enquiry, or to continue in a wilful negligence and careless suspense of mind in a matter of such vast consequence, is a most unaccountable and inexcusable conduct, altogether unworthy of reasonable thinking beings.

Let Christianity therefore be carefully examined. Let the evidence for the facts on which its divine authority is supported, be coolly and impartially considered; whether it is not as much as could be reasonably desired, supposing those facts were true, and which would be accounted sufficient in any other case. Let the original records of Christianity be inquired into: whether they have not the characters of genuine simplicity, integrity, and a sincere regard to truth; and whether they have not been transmitted to us with an evidence equal or superior to what can be produced for any

other writings whatsoever. Let the nature and tendency of the religion itself be considered : whether the idea there given us of the Deity be not such as tendeth to render him both amiable and most venerable, to fill our hearts with a superlative love to God, as having given the most amazing proofs of his wonderful love and goodness towards mankind, and at the same time with a sacred awe and reverence of him as the wise and righteous governor of the world, a lover of order, and a hater of vice and wickedness ; whether its precepts be not unquestionably pure and holy, and such as, if faithfully complied with, would raise our natures to an high degree of moral excellence ; whether the uniform tendency of the whole scheme of religion there held forth to us, be not to promote the honour of God and the good of mankind, and the cause of piety, righteousness, and virtue in the world ; to engage us to worship God with a pure adoration and devotion, to deal justly, kindly, and equitably with all men, and to subdue the sensual irregular affections and lusts, and keep them within proper bounds. Superstition and false devotion have frequently put men upon unnatural and excessive rigours and austerities ; but Christianity, like the blessed author of it, keeps clear of all extremes. It abridgeth us of no pleasures within the bounds of purity and innocence : nor doth it oblige us to extinguish our natural appetites and passions, but to govern and moderate them, and preserve them in a regular subjection to reason, and the law of the mind : and certainly it is necessary, for our own quiet and happiness, and for the good order of society, that we should do so. And finally, let it be considered, whether any motives could possibly be exhibited more powerful and engaging than those which the gospel setteth before us. It proposeth the noblest models for our imitation : God himself, in his imitable moral excellencies ; and his well-beloved Son, the most perfect image of his own goodness and purity. It displayeth all the charms and attractions of redeeming grace and love, to allure us. It giveth the greatest encouragement to sinners to repent, and forsake their evil ways ; and promiseth the most gracious assistances to help our infirmities, and to strengthen our weak but sincere endeavours in the performance of our duty. It raiseth us to the most glorious prospects and sublime hopes, than which nothing can possibly have a happier tendency to engage us to a patient continuance in well-doing, amidst the many difficulties and temptations of this present state. The rewards it proposeth are such as are fitted to animate holy and generous souls, and to produce, not a servile and mercenary frame of spirit, but a true greatness of mind, viz. a happiness consisting in the perfection of our natures, in a conformity to God, and the eternal enjoyment of him, and in the pure pleasures of society and friendship with glorious angels, and the spirits of the just made perfect. And on the other hand, to make an impression upon those that are insensible to the charms and beauty of virtue, it maketh the most lively and affecting representations of the terrors of the wrath to come, and the punishments that shall be executed in a future state upon those that obstinately persist in a course of presumptuous sin and disobedience.

This is an imperfect sketch of the nature and design of Christianity, as laid down in the gospel. In this view let it be considered, and not be unjustly charged, as it hath often been, with corruptions that are only owing to a deviation from its original purity ; or with the practices of those who, though they make a profession of believing it, allow themselves in courses which it forbids and condemns. What a happy world would this be, if men could be more generally persuaded to yield a willing subjection to its divine authority, and to comply with its true spirit and design, and to give themselves up to be governed by its excellent precepts and important motives !

What then can those propose, that take pains to turn men from such a religion as this, and to weaken or subvert the evidences of its divine authority ? Can they pretend to introduce a more pure and sublime morality, or to enforce it with more powerful motives ? Do they propose to render men more holy and virtuous, more pious and devout towards God, more just and kind and benevolent towards men, more temperate and careful in the due government of their appetites and passions, than the gospel requireth and obligeth them to be ? Do they intend to advance the interests of virtue, by depriving it of its most effectual encouragements and supports ; or to exalt the joys of good men, by weakening their hopes of everlasting happiness ; or to restrain and reclaim the wicked and vicious, by freeing them from the fears of future punishment ?

There is a great complaint of a growing dissoluteness of manners, and of a general corruption. His Lordship representeth this in the most lively terms ; but, instead of ascribing it to the proper causes, he is for laying the whole load of it on the present establishment. Far from directing to the proper cure, he hath done what he could to take away that which would be the most effectual remedy, the influence of Christianity on the minds and consciences of men. When the restraints of religion are once taken off, what can be expected but that they should abandon themselves to the conduct of their passions ? Human laws and penalties will be found to be weak ties where there is no fear of God, nor regard to a future state, or the powers of the world to come. In proportion as a neglect or contempt of religion groweth amongst us, a dissoluteness of morals will prevail ; and when once this becometh general among a people, true probity and virtue, a right public spirit, and generous concern for the real interests of our country, will be extinguished. Surely then all that wish well to the good order of society, and to the happiness of mankind, ought to wish that true uncorrupted Christianity should generally obtain and prevail ; and that men should not only heartily believe, but seriously consider it, and endeavour to get it wrought into the very frame and temper of their souls. For Christianity is not a mere outward form and profession, but a living principle, of a practical nature and tendency. And it is not enough to have a speculative notion and belief of it ; but we must consider it with that attention which becometh us, and do what we can to enforce its excellent doctrines and motives upon our hearts.

REFLECTIONS

ON THE LATE

LORD BOLINGBROKE'S LETTERS.

PART I.

On the Study and Use of History.

THE late Lord Bolingbroke has generally obtained the reputation of being one of the finest writers in our language. This hath procured him a kind of authority in the world, which makes way for an easy and favourable reception of any thing that is published under his name. A writer possessed of such talents hath it in his power to be signally serviceable to religion, and the true interest of his country; and on the other hand, there is scarce any thing of more pernicious influence than such talents misapplied. When the public was first informed of Letters written by him on the Study and Use of History, it was natural to expect something very entertaining and improving from such an author on such a subject. And it will not be denied, that he has many good, and some very curious observations, expressed in a very genteel manner, and with great elegance and purity of style; but these are interspersed with others of a very different kind, and of a dangerous tendency.

In these Letters his Lordship has done what he could to expose the authority of the Scriptures to contempt; and at the same time has made the most disadvantageous representation of the present state of the government and constitution of his country. If we are to trust the accounts he giveth us, Christianity hath no real foundation of truth in fact to depend upon; it hath been upheld by superstition, ignorance, and imposture; and hath been visibly decaying ever since the revival of learning and knowledge. And our civil constitution, instead of being rendered better at the late Revolution, hath been ever since growing worse; and our liberties are in more real danger than they were in before. The natural tendency of such representations is to inspire a thorough contempt and disregard of the religion into which we were baptized, and to produce endless jealousies and discontents, if not open insurrections, against the government under which we live. No man, therefore, who hath a

just zeal for either of these, can see without concern such an insolent attempt against both. And in this case, the quality, the ability, the reputation of the writer, as it maketh the attempt more dangerous, rendereth it more necessary to guard against it. If an inferior writer had said all that his Lordship hath advanced, it would have deserved very little notice. But there are too many that are ready almost implicitly to swallow down any thing that cometh to them recommended by a great name; especially if it be advanced with a very peremptory and decisive air. And if an author's account of himself must be taken, there perhaps scarce ever was a writer whose judgment ought to have greater weight, or who better deserves that an almost implicit regard should be had to his dictates, than the author of these Letters.

He enters upon his first Letter with declaring, that the rules he is going to recommend as necessary to be observed in the study of history, were—"very different from those which writers on the same subject have recommended, and which are commonly practised."—But he assureth his reader (and I believe him) that—"this never gave him any distrust of them."—And therefore he proposeth to tell his sentiments—"without any regard to the opinion and practice even of the learned world."*—He declareth it as his opinion, that—"A creditable kind of ignorance is the whole benefit which the generality of men, even of the most learned, reap from the study of history, which yet appeareth to him of all other the most proper to train us up to private and public virtue."†—Surely then the world must be mightily obliged to an author, who comes to give them instructions and directions in a matter of such great importance, which the generality of men, even of the most learned, were unacquainted with before.

In his Letter on the *True Use of Retirement and Study*, he finely representeth, what—"a desirable thing it must be to every thinking man, to have the opportunity indulged to so few, of living some years at least to ourselves, in a state of freedom, under the laws of reason, instead of passing our whole time under those of authority and custom."—And asks—"Is it not worth our while to contemplate ourselves and others, and all the things of this world, once before we leave them, through the medium of pure and undefiled reason?"‡—He observes that "they who can abstract themselves from the prejudices, and habits, and pleasures, and business of the world, which," he says, "is what many are, though all are not, capable of doing, may elevate their souls in retreat to a higher station, and may take from thence such a view of the world as the second Scipio took, in his dream, from the seats of the blessed."—That this will enable them to—"distinguish every degree of probability, from the lowest to the highest, and mark the difference between this and certainty, and to establish peace of mind, where alone it can rest securely, on resignation."§ In what follows he

* Works, vol. i. p. 1, 2.

† Ibid. p. 15.
§ Ibid. p. 199.

‡ Ibid. vol. ii. p. 197.

punished beyond his demerits. This incontestably follows from the frequent declarations that are made, and which have been already produced, that God will render to every man according to his deeds, without respect of persons. But besides these general declarations, there are several passages of Scripture which are designed to show, that there shall be a remarkable difference made between some bad men and others in the punishments inflicted on them; and that in the inflicting these punishments, a regard shall be had to the different aggravations of their crimes. This is what our Lord plainly signifies, when he declares with great solemnity, that it *shall be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment*, that is, for the most profligate parts of the heathen world, than for those that obstinately rejected and abused the gospel offers of mercy and salvation, and who go on in an obstinate course of presumptuous sin and disobedience, in opposition to the clearest light and most glorious advantages. And again, he declares, that *that servant which knew his Lord's will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. But he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes. For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall much be required: and to whom men have committed much, of him will they ask the more*, Luke xii. 47. 48. Nothing can be plainer than it is from this representation, that among those who shall be punished in a future state, great difference shall be made in the degrees of punishment inflicted on them, according to their different demerits; and that an exact consideration shall be had of their several cases, and an equitable proportion shall be observed, and all proper allowances made. The general descriptions therefore of these future punishments are to be interpreted in a consistency with supposing a very great difference made between some and others in the degrees of their punishment. In these general descriptions, the strongest images of terror are made use of, and it is highly proper it should be so. The punishments are described in their highest degree, as they shall be inflicted on the most obstinate and heinous offenders. No-where are we particularly told what shall be the lowest degree of punishment which shall be inflicted in that future world; nor what that state of vice and guilt is which shall subject men to the least punishment. Such declarations could answer no good end, and would probably be abused. It is more wisely done to leave that matter in general expressions; at the same time assuring us, that every man shall be punished in a strict proportion to the circumstances of his crime.

A due consideration of this will in a great measure obviate the principal objections this author hath urged against the eternal duration of that future punishment, which depend principally upon this supposition, that all shall be alike subjected to the most extreme degree of torment and misery, and so shall continue for ever: whereas, if it be considered, that there shall be a great difference made between some and others, in that future world; that the state of some shall be tolerable, compared with that of others; and that

whole. He everywhere pronounceth in a dogmatical and decisive way, and with a kind of dictatorial authority; and seemeth to regard himself as placed in a distinguished sphere, from whence he looketh down with superiority and contempt upon those that have hitherto passed for learned and knowing. To this may be added, what can scarcely escape the notice of the commonest reader, a visible affectation of advancing something new, and which had not been thought of, or insisted upon, before. How often doth the polite author of these Letters, when giving his directions, and making his observations upon the study and use of history, put his noble correspondent in mind, that they were quite different from any thing that had been observed by those learned men who had treated of this subject before him? In this I think him mistaken. But at present I only mention it as a proof of the desire he was possessed with of appearing to think in a way different from, and superior to, the rest of mankind, even of the learned world. Such a desire and affectation of novelty, and of thinking out of the common way, may lead persons of great parts astray in their enquiries after truth, and hath often done so.

But there are other passions and affections that have a still less friendly influence, and which are apt to give a wrong bias to the mind. Such is that keenness and bitterness of spirit which disposeth a man to find fault, and to put the most unfavourable constructions upon persons and things. I will not charge the late Lord Bolingbroke with having been really under the influence of such a temper; but there are several things in his Letters which have that appearance. In his *Reflections upon Exile*, he layeth it down as a rule, *to live and write without passion*: he talks as if he had got above all outward evils, and had attained to a perfect tranquillity. And yet in these very Reflections, there are several passages that discover a very strong resentment, and great bitterness of spirit. He there intimates, that—"his country had reaped the benefit of his services, and he suffered for them—That the persons in opposition to whom he served, and even saved the public, conspired and accomplished his private ruin—That these were his accusers, and the giddy ungrateful crowd his judges—That art, joined to malice, endeavoured to make his best actions pass for crimes, and to stain his character—That for this purpose the sacred voice of the senate was made to pronounce a lie; and those records, which ought to be the eternal monuments of truth, became the vouchers of imposture and calumny."* This is very strongly expressed. I shall not at present inquire into the truth and justness of those Reflections. I shall only observe, that this is not the language of a man who *lives and writes without passion*, or who is so *indifferent to common censure or approbation*, as he professeth himself to be. Nor is it easy to reconcile this with that philosophic calmness, that moderation, and tranquillity of mind, which he sometimes makes so great a show of. There are several parts of his Letters, as I may

* Works, vol. ii. p. 270, 271.

† Ibid. vol. i. p. 6.

have occasion more distinctly to observe afterwards, in which he expresseth himself with all the rage and virulence of a passionate party-writer.

It were not so much to be wondered at, if he discovered a resentment against those whom he might apprehend to be the authors of his sufferings; but there are several things that look as if he were out of humour with mankind. Of the critics, chronologers, antiquaries, and of the learned in general, even those of them that have been in the highest reputation, he frequently expresseth the utmost contempt. He inveighs severely against the divines, ancient and modern; and represents even those of them who, he says, may be called so without a sneer, as not sagacious or not honest enough, to make an impartial examination. The gentlemen of the law fall under his heavy censure; and he will scarcely allow, that since Lord Bacon, and the Earl of Clarendon, there have been any of them that have attained to any eminent degree of learning and knowledge; and he taketh upon him to foretel, that, except there should come some better age, there will not be any such among them for the future. The members of parliament he represents as regarding the business of parliament only as a trade; that few know, and scarce any respect, the British constitution; and that the very idea of wit, and all that can be called taste, has been lost among the great. Such general censures might be expected in a writer that professedly sets himself to display his talents in satire and ridicule; but do not look so well in one that appeareth in a superior character, and who taketh upon him to instruct and guide, to form men's taste, and direct their conduct, and enable them to pass right judgments on persons and things. Such a temper is not a very good disposition for an impartial enquiry; it is apt to represent persons and things in a disadvantageous light, and to give a malignant tincture to the Reflections; nor is it very surprising to see a writer of this turn pass harsh and severe censures, not only on the administration, but on the religion, of his country.

All the use I would make of these observations is, to keep us from suffering ourselves to be too strongly biassed in favour of a writer so distinguished by his abilities, and who putteth on such specious appearances.

I shall now proceed to a more distinct examination of Lord Bolingbroke's Letters.

In them we may find, as hath been already hinted, many good and fine observations relating to the study and use of history, delivered with great clearness of expression, and propriety of sentiment. His directions are full of good sense, and many of them very aptly illustrated by proper and well-chosen instances. In general, it must be allowed, that his observations concerning the usefulness of history, the advantages he ascribes to it, and the ends to be proposed in it, are, for the most part, just; but there is not much in them that can be regarded as perfectly new. I do not say this by way of disparagement, to detract from the merit of his Reflections: perhaps on such a subject it is scarce possible to make

any observation which hath not been made by some one or other before. It is a sufficient commendation of an author, if he hath placed his reflections and observations in an agreeable and advantageous light, if he hath disposed them in a beautiful order, and illustrated his rules by proper exemplifications. But his Lordship seems not to be contented with the praise of having done this. He appears to be extremely desirous to have it thought, that his observations are not only just, but new, and such as other writers have not made before him. He declareth, in a passage cited before from his first Letter, that the rules he gives—"are very different from those which writers on the same subject have recommended, and which are commonly practised :"^{*}—And that—"he will have no regard to the methods prescribed by others, or to the opinion and practice even of the learned world."[†]—And he speaks to the same purpose in his third Letter.[‡] And after having declared, that the study of history will prepare us for action and observation, and that—"history is conversant about the past ; and by knowing the things that have been, we become better able to judge of the things that are ;"—he adds,—"This use, my Lord, which I make the proper and principal use of the study of history, is not insisted on by those who have written concerning the method to be followed in this study ; and since we propose different ends, we must of course take different ways."[§] He immediately subjoins, "Few of their treatises have fallen into my hands." And is it not a little strange that he should so positively pronounce, that others have not, in their treatises concerning the method to be followed in the study of history, insisted on that which he makes the proper and principal use of it, when at the same time he acknowledgeth that few of their treatises had fallen into his hands ? One would think, by his way of representing it, that none before this noble writer had mentioned it as the proper use and end of history, to promote our improvement in virtue, to make us better men and better citizens, to teach us by example, and to prepare us for action and observation, that by knowing the things that have been, we may become better able to judge of the things that are. And yet I am apt to think, that few have set themselves to show the use that is to be made of history, the ends to be proposed in it, and the advantages arising from it, but have in effect said the same thing. And it were no hard matter, if it were necessary, to fill up several pages with quotations to this purpose, from authors ancient and modern.

History is, no doubt, capable of being improved to excellent purposes ; and yet the author of these Letters seems sometimes to have carried it too far, as if history (not sacred history—for this, with the examples it affordeth, he discards as of little or no use) were the best, the only school of virtue, the most universal and necessary means of instruction, alone sufficient to make us good men and good citizens, and to furnish us with all the knowledge that is proper for

^{*} Works, vol. i. p. 1.

[†] Ibid. p. 2.
[§] Ibid. p. 67, 68.

[‡] Ibid. p. 69.

our direction in practice. He observes,—"that history is philosophy, teaching us by example, how to conduct ourselves in all the stations of private and public life."—And that—"it is of all other the most proper to train us up to public and private virtue."* He declares, that—"every one that is able to read, and to reflect upon what he reads, is able to make that use of history which he recommends: and every one who makes it, will find in his degree the benefit that arises from an early acquaintance with mankind, contracted in this method."†—He adds, that—"we are only passengers or sojourners in this world; but we are absolute strangers at the first steps we take in it. Our guides are often ignorant, often unfaithful. But by this map of the country which history spreads before us, we may learn, if we please, to guide ourselves."—So that history is the guide he proposeth to all men to conduct them in their journey through this world, and by which every man is capable of guiding himself in all the situations and circumstances of public and private life.

History is, no doubt, very useful in its proper place; but there are other means of instruction to be joined with it, in order to its answering the end. It is not to serve instead of every thing, and to supersede all other methods of instruction. We stand in need of being well seasoned and principled with a just sense of the moral differences of things, and with the excellent rules of religion, and the important considerations it setteth before us, that we may form just sentiments of things, and may make a right use of history for our improvement in virtue, and may know properly how to apply the examples it furnisheth. Accordingly our author himself insisteth upon it, that we must apply ourselves to history—"in a philosophical spirit and manner."‡—He observeth, that—"particular examples in history may be of use sometimes in particular cases, but that the application of them is dangerous."—He would have a man therefore study history as he would study philosophy. And in the account he gives in his third Letter of what is necessary in order to make a right use of history, he carrieth it so far, and really maketh the work so difficult, as to be above what can be expected from the generality of mankind; and concludeth with saying, that—"by such methods as these a man of parts may improve the study of history to its proper and principal use."§—Where he seemeth to represent the making a right use of history as a very difficult thing, which none but men of parts and philosophic spirits are capable of, and which requireth the exactest judgment, and nicest discernment, as well as a very close application. In this passage the use and advantage of history seems to be confined within too narrow bounds, as in some of the former it had been extended too far.

As to the method to be followed in the study of history, though the author of these Letters speaks with great disregard, and even contempt, of those that have written on this subject before him, yet

* Works, vol. i. p. 15. 57.

† Ibid. p. 171, 172.

‡ Ibid. p. 58.

§ Ibid. p. 65, 66.

the only one he particularly mentions is Bodin. He observeth, that "in his method we are apt to take first a general view of universal history and chronology in short abstracts, and then to study all particular histories and systems."—Upon which his Lordship remarketh, that—"This would take up our whole lives, and leave us no time for action, or would make us unfit for it."*—And afterwards he observes, that—"the man who reads without discernment and choice, and, like Bodin's pupil, resolves to read all, will not have time, nor capacity neither, to do any thing else."†—But I cannot think it was Bodin's intention to lay it as an injunction upon his pupil to read without choice and discernment all the particular histories that have ever been published. But the meaning is, that the best and most regular way of reading and studying history is, first to take a brief general view and survey of universal history and chronology, and then to proceed to the histories of particular countries, nations, and ages. And this appeareth to be a very reasonable and natural method. And if Bodin proposes the taking a large scope and compass in reading history, his Lordship, though he seems here to blame him for it, sometimes expresseth himself in a manner that looks no less extensive: for he recommendeth the reading history of all kinds, of civilized and uncivilized, of ancient and modern nations, as necessary to give us a right knowledge of the human species, and of ourselves. He observes in his fifth Letter, that "man is the subject of every history, and to know him well, we must see him and consider him, as history alone can present him to us, in every age, in every country, in every state, in life and in death. History therefore of all kinds, of civilized and uncivilized, of ancient and modern nations, in short, all history that descends to a sufficient detail of human actions and characters, is useful to bring us acquainted with our species, nay with ourselves."‡ And particularly with respect to ancient history, he mentioneth it in his second Letter as a great advantage, that "in ancient history the beginning, the progression, and the end, appear, not of particular reigns, much less of particular enterprizes, or systems of policy alone, but of governments, of nations, of empires, and of all the various systems that have succeeded one another in the course of their duration."§ And yet he afterwards seems to confine our attention to modern history. He will allow us indeed to *read* the histories of former ages and nations, because it would be shameful to be entirely ignorant of them; but he would not have us *study* any histories, but those of the two last centuries. That these deserve a particular attention, will easily be acknowledged, for several reasons; and, among others, for that which he assigns; the great change that has been brought about in the civil and ecclesiastical polity of these parts of the world since the latter end of the fifteenth century: of which he gives an elegant representation in his sixth Letter. But certainly there are many things in the histories of the preceding ages, both in other countries, and in our own, that well deserve to be not

* Works, vol. i. p. 69. † Ibid. p. 142, 143. ‡ Ibid. p. 170. § Ibid. p. 42.

only read, but to be thoroughly considered by us; and which are capable of furnishing very useful reflections, and answering those excellent ends, for which, in the former part of these Letters, he had recommended the study of history. This might easily be shown, if it admitted of any doubt, both with regard to civil history and ecclesiastical.

But, not to insist longer upon this, and some other observations that might be made on particular passages in these Letters, I shall proceed to what is the principal intention of these Remarks, *viz.* to consider those things in them, of which a bad use may be made, or which appear to be of a pernicious tendency.

And here I shall first consider the reflections he has cast upon literature; and then shall proceed to those passages in his Letters, which are designed to expose the holy Scriptures, and the Christian religion.

It may seem a little surprising, that so polite a writer, and one who, as he lets us know, always from his youth loved study and application, should yet, in several parts of these Letters, express himself in a manner that seems calculated to throw a contempt upon learning, and to put men off from applying themselves to the pursuit of it. Every friend of learning should, I think, acknowledge, that there is a regard due to those that in their several ways have contributed to promote it. But this ingenious writer takes every occasion to place them in a ridiculous or contemptible light. In his first Letter, he gives a very disadvantageous idea of those who, as he expresseth it, "make fair copies of foul manuscripts, give the signification of hard words, and take a great deal of other grammatical pains." He owns indeed, that *they enable others to study with greater ease, and to purposes more useful*; but he assures us, that *they neither grow wiser nor better by study themselves*. He adds, that "the obligation to these men would be great indeed, if they were in general able to do any thing better, and submitted to this drudgery for the use of the public, as some of them, it must be owned with gratitude, have done; but not later, I think, than about the time of the resurrection of letters." And he at length condescendeth to declare, that "they deserve encouragement, whilst they continue to compile, and neither affect wit, nor presume to reason."* This is a very hard censure pronounced upon all those, without distinction, that since the time of the resurrection of letters, *i. e.* for these two centuries past, have compiled dictionaries or glossaries, or have revised and published ancient manuscripts, or correct editions of books; or who have been employed in explaining hard words, and in clearing obscure passages in ancient authors, or making critical observations upon them, and in other things of that kind. Not content to represent them as absolutely void of genius, and having no pretensions to wit or reason, and as neither wiser nor better for their studies themselves, he will not allow, that any of them had the public good in view, in the drudgery they submitted

* Works, vol. i. p. 5, 6.

to. But I scarce know a greater sign of a malignity of temper, than a disposition to give the worst turn to every thing, and to judge harshly of the inward intentions of men's hearts, when there is nothing in their actions to support such a judgment. It were easy to name persons, that, within these two last centuries, have employed themselves in the way he mentions, who were unquestionably men of great judgment and genius, as well as industry : or, at least, a small share of good-nature and candour would incline one to allow them the praise of having had the public utility in view, in works, which, by his own acknowledgment, have greatly served the interests of learning, and contributed to the spreading of it.

But how meanly soever he thinks of the grammarians, critics, compilers of dictionaries, and revisers and publishers of manuscripts, he maketh a still more disadvantageous representation of antiquaries and chronologers. Speaking of persons that have hitherto been regarded as of great figure and eminence in the republic of letters, he avoweth "a thorough contempt for the whole business of their learned lives; for all the researches into antiquity, for all the systems of chronology and history, that we owe to the immense labours of a Scaliger, a Bochart, a Petavius, an Usher, and even a Marsham."* It seems very odd, for one that speaks so highly of the advantage of history, to express such a contempt for the labours of chronologers, which certainly are of great use for digesting history into its proper periods, in order to a regular and orderly conception and understanding of it. In a passage cited above, he mentioneth it among the advantages of history, especially ancient history, that we there see events as they followed one another; "that there the beginning, the progression, and the end, appear, not of particular reigns, much less of particular enterprizes, or systems of policy alone, but of governments, of nations, of empires, and of all the various systems that have succeeded one another in the course of their duration." This seems to show the advantage, and even necessity, of chronology; and, with regard to this, the labours of a Scaliger, a Petavius, and Usher, are highly useful and commendable. To endeavour to digest the history of mankind, and of the principal events that have happened in the world, in a regular series, to mark the rise and fall of cities and empires, to compare and connect the histories of different countries and nations, sacred history and profane; and, in order to this, to lay together the scattered hints and fragments of different ages, is, notwithstanding, his degrading representation of it, a noble employment, an employment that even a Sir Isaac Newton judged not to be unworthy of his great genius. One would be apt to think, that every impartial person, who hath a just value for learning, must have a great honour for those that have taken pains to set these things in a proper light: and where absolute certainty cannot be attained to, an happy conjecture may be both pleasing and useful.

In his third letter, he findeth great fault with those that make

* Works, vol. i. p. 6.

laborious inquiries into the first originals of nations. And in his fifth letter, he warneth the noble Lord to whom he writes, to *throw none of his time away*, as he saith he himself had done, in *groping in the dark in his searches into antiquity*.^{*} He speaks with contempt of what he calls *dry registers of useless anecdotes*; and declares that “ten millions of such anecdotes, though they were true; and complete authentic volumes of Egyptian or Chaldean, of Greek or Latin, of Gallic or British, of French or Saxon records; would be of no value in his sense, because of no use towards our improvement in wisdom and virtue; if they continued nothing more than dynasties and genealogies, and a bare mention of remarkable events in the order of time, like journals, chronological tables, or dry and meagre annals.”[†]—But whatever opinion I may have of his Lordship's taste, I cannot help thinking, that in this he is too rigid. It seems to be a very natural and unblameable curiosity, to search as far as we can into the recesses of antiquity, and the originals of nations; and there is a pleasure even in those glimmerings of light that break through the obscurity, provided we do not represent those things as certainties, which are only conjectural. And I believe there are few but would be apt to wish, that there were——“authentic volumes of Egyptian or Chaldean, Greek or Latin, Galic or British records”——even though they were only like what he calls——“dry and meagre annals,”——or, as he elsewhere says,——“the gazettes of antiquity;”——and contained dynasties and genealogies, with a mention of remarkable events that happened to those nations in the order of time, like journals, or chronological tables. And if any learned man could discover such ancient or authentic records or monuments, few, I should think, would blame him, or think him idly employed in publishing them to the world.

It looks a little odd, that there is no kind of men for whom, throughout these letters, he sheweth a less regard than for those that are generally accounted men of learning. Speaking of those who “affect the reputation of great scholars, at the expence of groping all their lives in the dark mazes of antiquity,” he says, that “all these mistake the true design of study, and the true use of history.” Great as the advantages are that he ascribeth to history, and which he thinks every man is capable of that is able to read, and to reflect upon what he reads, yet——“a creditable kind of ignorance is, in his opinion, the whole benefit which the generality even of the most learned reap from it.”——And he intimates, that the only effect of their reading and studying history is, to become pedants, *i. e.* as he explaineth it, “worse than ignorant, always incapable, sometimes meddling and presuming.”——And elsewhere he representeth the credulous learned as only employed——“in wrangling about ancient traditions, and ringing different changes on the same set of bells.”[§]

To all which may be added, what he saith, in his letter on the true use of retirement and study; concerning——“the scholar and

^{*} Works, vol. i. p. 149. [†] Ibid. p. 150. [‡] Ibid. p. 14, 15, 21. [§] Ibid. p. 169.

philosopher, who, far from owning that he throws away his time, reproves others for doing it; that solemn mortal who abstains from the pleasures, and declines the business of the world, that he may dedicate his whole time to the search of truth, and the improvement of knowledge."—He supposes him to have read "till he is become a great critic in Latin and Greek, in the oriental tongues, in history and chronology; and not only so, but to have spent years in studying philosophers, commentators, and rabbies, and whole legions of modern doctors, and to be extremely well versed in all that has been written concerning the nature of God, and of the soul of man, about matter and form, body and spirit, &c."*—And yet he pronounceth, that notwithstanding all his learning, he is in a state of ignorance, for want of having—"examined the first principles, and the fundamental facts on which these questions depend, with an absolute indifference of judgment, and scrupulous exactness."† This he supposeth to be the case of many a great scholar, many a profound philosopher, many a dogmatical casuist; yea, and as appeareth from other passages in his letters, of every learned man, of every philosopher and divine whatsoever, that believeth Christianity. On the other hand, he declareth concerning—"the man who hath passed his life in the pleasures or business of the world,"—that whenever he sets about the work of examining principles, and judging for himself—"concerning those things that are of greatest importance to us here, and may be so hereafter, he will soon have the advantage over the learned philosopher. For he will soon have secured what is necessary to his happiness, and may sit down in the peaceful enjoyment of that knowledge; or proceed with greater advantage and satisfaction to the acquisition of new knowledge; whilst the other continues his search after things that are in their nature, to say the best of them, hypothetical, precarious, and superfluous."‡

The natural tendency of these, and other reflections of a like kind, which occur in these letters, seems to be to pour contempt upon what have been hitherto esteemed valuable branches of literature. Researches into antiquity, chronological studies, criticism and philosophy, disquisitions concerning the nature of God, the human soul, and other philosophical and theological subjects, all these are represented as of little or no use; and only a more specious kind of idleness. And if this be the case, I think it is wrong to complain of the Goths, Vandals, Saracens, and other barbarous nations, that burnt whole libraries, and destroyed the monuments of learning. They rid the world of a great deal of useless lumber, which tempted men to mis-spend their time and pains; and it would have been an advantage to mankind, if more of them had been destroyed. Instead of being thankful to those learned persons that have taken such pains to recover and publish ancient monuments, we are only to regard them as industrious triflers, to whose labours the world is very little obliged. Nor can I see, upon such a view of

* Works, vol. ii. p. 211, 212.

† Ibid, p. 213, 214.

‡ Ibid. p. 216, 217.

things, what use or need there is of seminaries of learning. But, in good earnest, can this be regarded as a proper way to mend our taste, and help forward our improvement? Such a way of thinking, if it generally obtained, would, it is to be feared, instead of producing an extraordinary refinement of taste, tend rather to sink us into ignorance and barbarism, and bring us back to the darkness of the most illiterate ages.

Taken in this view, I cannot think that these letters have a favourable aspect on the interests of literature. Methinks there appeareth to be no great necessity at present of warning persons not to spend their lives in laborious pursuits of learning. The prevailing turn of the age doth not seem to lie this way. Many of our gentlemen will no doubt be very well pleased to be assured, that though they pass their lives in the business or pleasures of the world, yet if they at length set themselves to examine first principles, and consult the oracle of their own reason, without any regard to the opinion of others, or troubling themselves to read the writings of philosophers or divines, they are in a more likely way of discovering truth, and making a progress in useful knowledge, than any of those "solemn mortals, who abstain from the pleasures, and decline the business of the world, that they may dedicate their whole time to the search of truth, and the improvement of knowledge." This is certainly a very flattering scheme, and seems to open a very short and easy way for attaining to wisdom. When they find a man of his Lordship's fine and elegant taste, and great talents, and who by his own account hath spent so much time and pains in the learned enquiries, pronouncing them absolutely vain and useless, they will be very apt to take his word for it, and not give themselves the trouble of laborious study; the result of which might be only filling their heads with what he calleth *learned lumber*, and exposing them to the ridiculous character of *pedants*, i. e. as he describeth them, "men worse than ignorant, always incapable, sometimes meddling and presuming." Instead of such learned drudgery, the more easy and delightful task of studying modern history may be sufficient to furnish them with all the knowledge they want, and answer every end of useful improvement.

But surely such a manner of representing things is not altogether just, nor is this the most effectual way of promoting real improvement in wisdom and virtue. Great is the extent, and wide the field, of science. Many noble subjects there are of enquiry, which well deserve our attention. The desire of knowledge is the strongest in the noblest minds; but comparatively small is the progress that a man is capable of making by his own unassisted ability, within the short compass of this present life: and therefore, be his abilities ever so great, he will need the assistance of others, and ought to be very thankful for it. Many excellent persons in different ages have employed their pains this way; and a mighty advantage that man hath, who has the opportunity, and knows how to improve it, of profiting by their labours. He may, by reading, vastly increase his stock of knowledge, may meet with many valuable hints, which

else would not have occurred to him, and may find important subjects set in a clearer light than otherwise he would have seen them. The Author of our beings, who hath implanted in us the desire of knowledge, and fitted us for communicating our sentiments; undoubtedly designed, that, in acquiring knowledge as well as in other things, we should be helpful to one another, and not depend merely upon ourselves. And this is the great advantage of language, and of letters. We must indeed make use of our own reason, but we ought also to take in all the helps and advantages we can get: and he that is careful to improve those helps which are afforded him, and who, without submitting implicitly to the judgments and opinions of others, endeavours to make the best use he can of their labours and studies, as well as of his own thoughts, is in a far more likely way of improving his knowledge, and will better approve himself to God, and to all wise men, than he that, from a vain confidence in his own judgment, despiseth and rejecteth those helps; and, under pretence of consulting the oracle of reason in his own breast, (for, as his Lordship expresseth it, "every man's reason is every man's oracle,") will not give himself the trouble to read and to examine what others have said and thought before him. Such an high conceit of a man's own capacity and judgment, such an arrogant self-sufficiency, and a contempt of the labours and judgments of others, is not a very proper disposition for finding out truth. A man of this character was Epicurus, who boasted that his knowledge was all of his own acquiring, and scorned to seem to be beholden to any other for his notions.

Having considered those parts of the late Lord Bolingbroke's Letters that seem not very favourable to the interests of literature, I shall now proceed to what is the principal design of these Remarks, to examine the reflections he has cast upon the sacred monuments of our religion. He first attacks the history of the Bible, especially as contained in the books of the Old Testament; and then proceeds to a more direct attempt upon Christianity. And this appears not to be a thing he treats of merely by the bye, but to be a point he has formally in view, and for which he professes a kind of zeal. I shall therefore consider distinctly what he hath offered.

In his third Letter on the study of history, he setteth himself to consider the state of ancient history, both sacred and profane, and begins with declaring his resolution—"to speak plainly and particularly in favour of common sense, against an absurdity which is almost sanctified."* After having made some observations on the state of ancient profane history, and shown, that it is full of fables, and altogether uncertain, he next comes to apply these observations to ancient sacred history.† What he seems at first to propose, is, to show, that it is "insufficient to give us light into the original of ancient nations, and the history of those ages we commonly call the first ages." But it is evident, that, under pretence of showing this,

* Works, vol. i. p. 70.

† Ibid. p. 83, & seq.

his intention is, to represent the whole history of the Bible as absolutely uncertain, and not at all to be depended upon for a just account of facts. He not only denieth, that the writers of the historical parts of the Old Testament were divinely inspired, but he will not allow them the credit that is due to any common honest historians. He represents those histories as "delivered to us on the faith of a superstitious people, among whom the custom and art of lying prevailed remarkably.* And observes, that "the Jewish history never obtained any credit in the world, till Christianity was established."† He sometimes expresseth himself, as if he were willing to allow the divine inspiration of the doctrinal and prophetical parts of the Bible, and were only for rejecting the historical. And this he pretends to be the best way to defend the authority of the Scriptures.‡ But it is evident that this is only a sneer. For he was, no doubt, sensible, that the sacred history is so interwoven with the prophecies and laws, that if the former is to be regarded as lying fiction, and not at all to be depended upon, the divine authority of the other cannot be supported. And what he afterwards repeatedly affirmeth of Christianity, that the credit of its divine institution dependeth upon facts, holdeth equally concerning the Old Testament economy.

After having done what he can, in his third Letter, to show the uncertainty of ancient sacred as well as profane history, he begins his fourth with observing, that as "we are apt naturally to apply to ourselves what has happened to other men; and as examples take their force from hence; so what we do not believe to have happened, we shall not thus apply; and, for want of the same application, the examples will not have the same effect." And then he adds, "ancient history, such ancient history as I have described," [in which ancient sacred history is manifestly comprehended] "is quite unfit in this respect to answer the ends that every reasonable man should promise to himself in his study; because such ancient history will never gain sufficient credit with any reasonable man."§ And afterwards speaking of ancient fabulous narrations, he declares, that "such narrations cannot make the slightest momentary impression on a mind fraught with knowledge and void of superstition. Imposed by authority, and assisted by artifice, the delusion hardly prevails over common sense; blind ignorance almost sees, and rash superstition hesitates: nothing less than enthusiasm and phrensy can give credit to such histories, or apply such examples." He thinks, that what he has said will "not be much controverted by any man that has examined our ancient traditions without prepossession:" And that all the difference between them, and Amadis of Gaul, is this, that "in Amadis of Gaul we have a thread of absurdities that lay no claim to belief; but ancient traditions are a heap of fables, under which some particular truths inscrutable, and therefore useless to mankind, may lie concealed, which have a just

* Works, vol. i. p. 87.

† Ibid. p. 91.
§ Ibid. p. 118.

‡ Ibid. p. 93. 98, 99.

pretence to nothing more," [*i. e.* to no more credit than Amadis of Gaul] "and yet impose themselves upon us, and become, under the venerable name of ancient history, the foundation of modern fables."* He doth not directly apply this to the Scriptures; but no one can doubt that this was his intention. It is too evident, that these are designed to be included in what he calleth "our ancient traditions;" (a word which he had applied several times before to the sacred records;) and which he representeth as "imposed by authority, and assisted by artifice." And I think it scarce possible to express a greater contempt of any writing, than he here doth of the history of the Bible, and the examples it affords.

PART II.

SECTION I.

The History and Scriptures of the Old Testament vindicated against his Lordship's Exceptions.

HAVING given this general view of the author's design, I shall now proceed to a more distinct and particular examination of the principal things he hath offered to invalidate the authority of the Old Testament history. What he saith of Christianity shall be considered afterwards.

I need not take much notice of what he hath urged to show, that the writers of the Sacred Books did not intend an universal history, or system of chronology.† I know nobody that supposes they did; so that he might have spared that part of his pains. But notwithstanding the Bible was not designed for an universal history, or to exhibit a complete system of chronology, though it may safely be affirmed, that no one book in the world gives so great helps this way, it is sufficient if it gives us a true history as far as it goes, and which may be safely depended upon. This is what our author will not allow. It is manifest, that he placeth it in the same rank with the most fabulous accounts of ancient times. This then is the point we are to consider. Let us therefore examine what proofs or arguments he hath brought against the truth and credit of the Sacred History.

Some of the things offered by him to this purpose have scarcely so much as the appearance of argument. Of this kind is what he saith concerning the use that has been made by Jewish Rabbies, and Christian fathers, and Mahometan doctors, of the short and imperfect accounts given by Moses of the times from the creation to the

* Works, vol. i. p. 120, 121.

† Ibid. p. 202, et seq.

deluge. Let us grant, that the fables they have feigned concerning Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel, Enoch, Noah, and his sons, &c. are such as "Bonzes or Talapoins would almost blush to relate;" I do not see how this can be reasonably turned to the disadvantage of the books of Moses, or hurt the credit of them; since his Lordship owns, that these fables are "prophane extensions of this part of the Mosaic history;" and that history is certainly no-way answerable for the additions which have been made to it. It would have been easy for Moses, if he had been a fabulous writer, to have filled up this part of his history with marvellous relations, and to have embellished it with such fictions, concerning our first parents, and the most ancient patriarchs, as our author here referreth to; and his not having done so is a strong presumption in his favour, that he did not give way to fancy or invention, but wrote down the facts as they came to him, with an unaffected simplicity. His accounts are short, because he kept close to truth, and took care to record no more of those times than he had good information of, or than was necessary to the design he had in view; which seems principally to have been to give a brief account of the creation, the formation of the first human pair, the placing them in Paradise, the fall, and the flood, which were the most remarkable events of that period; and to continue the line from Adam by Seth to Noah, as afterwards he does from him to Abraham.

What his Lordship observes concerning the blunders of the Jewish chronologers,* is not much more to his purpose, except he could prove, that those blunders are chargeable upon the Scriptures; which is so far from being true, that, if accurately examined, arguments may be brought from those very Scriptures to confute the blunders he mentions

As to the differences he takes notice of,† between the Scripture accounts of the Assyrian empire, and those given by profane authors; *i. e.* by Ctesias, and them that copy from him, very able chronologers have endeavoured to show, that those accounts may be reconciled. But if not, it would only follow, that the Scripture-history differeth from Ctesias, who, in his Lordship's own judgment, and by the acknowledgment of the most judicious among the Greeks themselves, was a very fabulous writer;‡ and how this can be fairly thought to derogate from the credit and authority of the sacred history, I cannot see.

But to come to those things on which he seems to lay a greater stress. The sum of what he hath offered to destroy the truth and credit of the sacred writings amounteth to this: "That the Jews, upon whose faith they are delivered to us, were a people unknown to the Greeks, till the time of Alexander the Great: That they had been slaves to the Egyptians, Assyrians, Medes, and Persians, as these several empires prevailed: That a great part of them had been carried captive, and lost in the east; and the remainder were carried captive to Babylon, where they forgot their country, and even

* Works, vol. i. p. 104.

† Ibid. p. 114, 115.

‡ Ibid. p. 76, 80.

their language:" And he intimates, that "there also they lost their ancient sacred books: That they were a superstitious people, among whom the custom and art of pious lying prevailed remarkably: That the original of the Scriptures was compiled in their own country, and, as it were, out of the sight of the rest of the world: That the Jewish history never obtained any credit till Christianity was established; but though both Jews and Christians hold the same books in great veneration, yet each condemns the other for not understanding, or for abusing them: That the accidents which have happened to alter the text of the bible show, that it could not have been originally given by divine inspiration; and that they are come down to us broken and confused, full of additions, interpolations, and transpositions: That they are nothing more than compilations of old traditions, and abridgments of old records made in later times: And that Jews and Christians differ among themselves concerning almost every point that is necessary to establish the authority of those books." He concludes with "some observations on the curse said to be pronounced by Noah upon Canaan," which he would have pass for "an absurd fiction of the writer of the book of Genesis;" and he seemeth to have singled out this as one of the properest instances he could find for exposing the Scripture.

Let us consider these things distinctly.

It is no just prejudice against the credit of the Scripture history, that the Jews, among whom those writings were preserved, and whose affairs are there recorded, were, as appeareth from those writings, "slaves to the Egyptians, Assyrians, Medes, and Persians, as their several empires prevailed."* It rather furnisheth a proof of the truth and impartiality of those records, that they give an undisguised account, not only of the flourishing times of their state (for there were times in which they were flourishing, free, and independent), but of their disgraces, defeats, captivities, and all the calamities that befell them, which, according to these accounts, were in a way of just punishment for their national iniquities, their disobedience and ingratitude. Yet under all these various revolutions, their nation was never entirely lost, nor incorporated with their conquerors. Though many of them revolted, still there was a number of them that with an unalterable zeal and constancy adhered to their ancient religion and laws, which they regarded as of a divine original: a religion remarkably distinct from that of the nations to which they were subjected, and on the account of which they were frequently exposed to hatred, persecution, and reproach.

If the Jews were unknown to the Greeks before Alexander the Great, this affordeth not the least probable presumption, that their ancient history is not to be depended upon. The Greeks, by this author's own acknowledgment, did not begin to write history till very late. The knowledge they had of other nations was very narrow and confined; and, particularly, they were in a great measure strangers to the languages, laws, customs, and history, of the eastern

* Works, vol. i. p. 84.

nations. He himself observes, that after the times of Alexander the Great, and even long after the Jewish Scriptures were translated into Greek, the Jews, and their history were neglected by them, and continued to be almost as much unknown as before.* And yet certain it is, that the Jews were then a considerable people, and that the Greeks had many opportunities of being acquainted with them. Let us grant what he insinuates, that this was owing, not to want of curiosity in the Greeks, since they were, as he observes, "inquisitive to the highest degree, and published as many idle traditions of other nations as of their own;"† but to the contempt they had for the Jews. What can be inferred from thence? Doth it follow that the Jewish Scriptures are not authentic, nor their histories to be credited, because the Greeks neglected or despised them, and did not own their authority? This is easily accounted for by any one that considers the nature of the Jewish institutions. It is not to be wondered at, that a people so excessively vain as the Greeks, and who looked upon the rest of the world as barbarians, should conceive an aversion or contempt for a nation, whose laws and religion were so different from their own, among whom all image-worship was most expressly prohibited, and no adoration was paid to inferior deities, in which the religion of the Greeks, and of which they were extremely fond, principally consisted. If the Jewish sacred books had contained strange stories of the exploits of their gods, of their genealogies, battles, and amours, or traditions that tended to support a system of idolatry, the Greeks undoubtedly would have been ready enough to transcribe these things into their writings; these fables would have been suited to their taste. But it cannot be supposed, that they should pay any regard to the accounts given of extraordinary miraculous facts, that were designed to establish and give sanction to a constitution, the manifest tendency of which was to condemn and subvert that idolatrous worship, to which they were so excessively addicted.

Among all the heathen nations, none expressed a greater enmity to the Jews than the Egyptians, who were themselves of all people the most stupidly idolatrous. One of their writers, Apion of Alexandria, is particularly mentioned by our author as having "spoken of the Jews in a manner neither much to their honour, nor to that of their histories." This seems to have recommended him to his Lordship's favour; for he speaks of him as a man "of much erudition, and as having passed for a curious, a laborious, and learned antiquary," though he owns that he passed also "for a vain and noisy pedant."‡ But if we may judge of him by the fragments of his work which Josephus has given us, he was, with regard to the Jews, an ignorant and malicious writer, who does not appear to have been acquainted with their histories and laws, though he pretended to write against them, and might so easily have procured information, if he had desired it. And this appears to have been the case of several others of the heathen writers that mention the

* Works, vol. i. p. 90.

† Ibid. p. 88.

‡ Ibid. p. 90, 91.

Jews. They seem not to have given themselves the trouble to make any diligent inquiry into their history or laws, as delivered by themselves, but took up with idle reports and traditions to their prejudice; and yet in the accounts given of the Jews by the heathen writers, imperfect as they are, there are some valuable hints and traces to be discerned, which show the falsehood of other things they report concerning them.*

It is therefore a little odd, that such a stress should be laid upon this, that "the Jewish history never obtained any credit in the world, till Christianity was established:" *i. e.* it obtained no credit among the heathen nations; or as he elsewhere expresseth it, "we do not find, that the authority of these books prevailed among the pagan world."† How could it be expected that it should? Since the heathens could not acknowledge it, and continue heathens; for it was absolutely subversive of the whole system of paganism. The authority of those books was believed and received among all those, by whom it could be reasonably expected that it should be believed and received: that is, it was acknowledged and received by that nation among whom those writings, and the memory of the laws and facts, had been constantly preserved, and who regarded them with great veneration, as of a divine original; and also by those among the heathens themselves, who, upon the credit of the Jewish religion, laws, and records, quitted the heathen idolatry: and these were all that could be reasonably expected to acknowledge the authority of the Jewish sacred books, even supposing their authority to have been ever so well founded.

But it is urged as a ground of suspicion against the Jewish Scriptures, that "they were compiled in their own country, and, as it were, out of the sight of the rest of the world." And it was certainly most proper, that the books in which their laws, and the most remarkable events relating to their nation, are recorded, should be published in their own country, the scene where the chief actions were laid. This is no diminution of their credit, but the contrary; and if they had been compiled in any other country, or by foreigners, and persons not of their own nation, it might have been said, and not without some appearance of reason, that they might be mistaken, and take up with wrong and imperfect accounts, both of laws and facts.

But what this author seems chiefly to insist upon, to show that

* There is an heathen writer, of a very different character from Apion, who gives a much more candid account of the Jewish nation: I mean the judicious Strabo, of whom our author himself speaks with the highest esteem. He makes the cause of Moses's forsaking Egypt to be his being dissatisfied with the false notions of God, and his worship, that had obtained among the Egyptians; and supposes him to have entertained juster and nobler notions of the divinity than the Egyptians, or Libyans, or Greeks: that with him went from Egypt many that honoured the deity, πολλοὶ τιμῶντες τὸ θεῖον; that he persuaded many good men, and brought them into the country where Jerusalem is built; and that there they continued, practising justice or righteousness, and being truly religious, or sincere worshippers of God, δίκαιπραγούντες καὶ ἐνσεβείς ἐν ἀληθῶς ὄντες, but that afterwards they degenerated.—See Strabo, lib. xvi.

† Works, vol. i. p. 87. 91.

little credit is to be given to these writings, is, "that they are histories delivered to us on the faith of a superstitious people; among whom the custom and art of pious lying prevailed remarkably."*

In order to form a proper judgment of this matter, let us take a brief view of the Jewish Scriptures, that we may see what likelihood there is of their having been feigned by a superstitious and lying people.

In general, it may be observed, that if we compare the sacred books of the Jews with those of any other the most admired nations, such as Greece and Rome, we shall soon see a most striking and amazing difference. Their whole constitution was of a peculiar nature; so vastly different from that of other countries, that it well deserveth the attention and admiration of every impartial and considering observer. It was the only constitution in the world, where the acknowledgment and worship of the one true God, the sovereign Lord of the universe, and of him alone, is made the fundamental maxim of their state, and principle of their government, in which all their laws centre, and the main end to which they are all directed. All worship of inferior deities is forbidden; no deified heroes admitted; no images suffered. Many of their sacred rites seem to have been instituted in a designed opposition to those of the neighbouring nations, that they might not incorporate with them, or learn their idolatrous customs, to which the Israelites, for a long time, were very prone. Nor is there any likelihood that they would have embraced or submitted to a constitution so different from the then generally prevailing idolatry, if it had not been for the manifest proofs that were given them of its divine original. The author of these Letters indeed intimates, that many of their rites were derived from the Egyptians; but whatever conformity there might be in some particular instances, nothing is more certain and evident, than that the whole system of the Jewish religion was most essentially opposite to that of the Egyptians, and other Pagan nations, and tended to cast contempt on their adored deities, and on that idolatrous worship to which the heathens were so much addicted, and which was established by the laws of their respective countries.

As to the moral and devotional treatises, which make up another part of their sacred writings, they are incontestably excellent. Their poetry is of a most divine strain, far superior to that of other ancient nations, having an unexampled dignity, elevation, and sublimity in it, filled with the noblest sentiments of the Divinity, and of his glorious incomparable perfections, and governing providence.

The same observation may be made on the prophetical writings, in which we may discern many remarkable characters of genuine truth and purity. A fervent zeal for God, and for pure and undefiled religion, everywhere appears; nor is there any thing in them

* Works, vol. i. p. 87.

that breathes the spirit of this world, or that savours of ambition, artifice, or imposture. The whole intention of them is manifestly to reclaim the people from idolatry, vice, and wickedness, to engage them to the pure worship of God, and to the practice of universal righteousness. With a noble freedom and impartiality do they reprove their kings, princes, priests, people; denouncing the most awful threatenings against them, if they should persist in their evil and sinful courses; and encouraging them with the most gracious promises to repentance, and new obedience; and all this mixed with many remarkable and express predictions of future events, which no human sagacity could have foreseen, and which derived such an authority to them, that though they were often reproached and persecuted when alive, their character and writings were afterwards regarded by the whole nation with the profoundest veneration. And it deserveth to be particularly remarked, that whereas the Jews, as well as mankind in all ages, have been prone to place religion chiefly in external forms, and ritual observances, as if these would compensate for the neglect of the moral precepts, there are many passages in their sacred books, especially those of the prophets, which in the strongest terms represent the utter insufficiency of all ritual observances without real holiness of heart and life, and even speak of them in a very diminutive manner, and with a seeming contempt, when opposed to, or abstracted from, moral goodness and virtue; and such writings certainly do not look like the inventions of a superstitious and lying people.

But as the sacred history is what this writer setteth himself particularly to expose and invalidate, let us take a brief view of the historical parts of Scripture; and these are no less remarkable, and worthy of our attention, than the laws, the prophecies, the moral and devotional writings.

As to a general idea of their history, it is of as different a complexion from that of other nations as their laws, and is of the same noble tendency with their other sacred books. It everywhere breathes the profoundest veneration for the Deity. The chief design of it is not merely to answer civil or political views, or to preserve the annals of their nation, or trace it up to its original (though this also is done), but for nobler purposes; to promote the true worship of God, and the practice of piety and virtue; to preserve the remembrance of God's wonderful works of providence towards his professing people; to show the favours, the blessings, the deliverances, vouchsafed to them, the prosperity and happiness they enjoyed, when they kept close to the laws of God, and continued in the practice of virtue and righteousness; and on the other hand, the great calamities which befell them when they broke the divine law and covenant, and lapsed into idolatry, vice, and wickedness. Such are the useful lessons which their history is designed to teach, and to this excellent end is it directed.

To which it may be added, that there are observable in it remarkable characters of simplicity, and an impartial regard to truth. It is plain, from the whole tenor of their history, that it was not con-

piled to give false and flattering accounts of their nation, or partial and elegant encomiums of their great men. Their great actions indeed are recorded, but their faults are also related, with a simplicity and impartiality that deserves to be admired. Neither Romans, Greeks, Egyptians, nor any other people, have formed their histories so much to the disadvantage of their own nation, or charged them with such repeated revolts from the religion and laws of their country. Let us suppose the Jews ever so much possessed with the spirit of lying, it would never have put them upon forging a body of history so much to the prejudice of their own national character. It tendeth indeed to give an high idea of the great things God had done for them, of the privileges conferred upon them, and the excellency of their laws, (and that their laws are excellent, no man can doubt that seriously reads and considers them), but at the same time it setteth the ingratitude, the disobedience, the stupidity, of that people, their opposition to God's authority, and abuse of his goodness, their manifold backslidings and unsteadfastness in his covenant, in the strongest light. Their disgraces, defeats, captivities, are nowhere concealed; they are represented as frequently brought under the yoke of the neighbouring nations, in a manner much to their dishonour; and their deliverances are ascribed, not to their own wisdom, conduct, and bravery, but to the mercy of God, upon their repentance. In a word, their history is a continued account of God's goodness, patience, and justice, exercised towards them; and of their own strange, perverse, and unaccountable conduct. This is so manifest, that it hath been often turned to their reproach, and hath given occasion to the representing them as an obstinate, ungrateful, and rebellious race, and to such a charge as St. Stephen advanceth against them from their own Scriptures: *Ye stiffnecked, and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost: as your fathers did, so do ye. Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted?* Acts vii. 51. These considerations naturally tend to derive a peculiar credit to the Jewish Scriptures, as containing true and faithful accounts, not forged by a superstitious lying people. Whatever opinion therefore we may have of the Jews, yet their sacred books deserve great regard. Nor is there any ground to suppose, that these books of records were of their inventing. At least, I believe, this will scarcely be pretended with regard to the Jews in the latter times of their state, however they might otherwise be addicted to fiction and embellishment. They received these books as sacred from their ancestors, and were themselves so fully persuaded of the divine original and authority of their laws, and the certainty and authenticity of these records, that they adhered to them with a zeal scarce to be paralleled in any other nation. So great was the veneration they had for them, that after the canon was completed, they were extremely scrupulous not to make any additions to their sacred books, or receive any others into their number as of equal authority, though written by the greatest and wisest men of their nation. And if any person had endeavoured to alter or corrupt them, the fraud, the imposture, must have been immedi-

ately detected. For these sacred books were not, like those of other nations, confined to the priests only; they were in the hands of the people, constantly and publicly read in their synagogues; the laws, and the facts, were what they were all acquainted with, and instructed in, from their infancy.

If therefore there be any ground of suspicion, it must fall, not upon the latter Jews, but upon Ezra, and those by whom the sacred canon was finished. If their history and sacred books were forged or corrupted, the most likely time that can be fixed for it, is upon their return from the Babylonish captivity. And this seems to be the æra fixed upon by the author of these Letters. He observes, that, "the Babylonish captivity lasted so long, and such circumstances, whatever they were, accompanied it, that the captives forgot their country, and even their language, the Hebrew dialect, at least, and character."* And afterwards he intimates, that the Scriptures were "lost during the captivity."† And he observes, that "Ezra began, and Simon the Just finished, the canon of the Scriptures."‡

Let us grant, that in the Babylonish captivity, the Jews learned the Chaldee language, which thenceforth became more familiar to them than the Hebrew; and that the old Hebrew character was, as many learned men suppose, though it is far from being certain, changed for the Chaldee; the latter being fairer, easier, and more generally used among the people; yet this is far from proving, either that the Hebrew language was entirely forgotten by them, or that their sacred books were lost in the captivity. There are many things that plainly show the contrary. The prophet Ezekiel, who prophesied during the captivity to the Jews in Chaldea, wrote and published his prophecies in Hebrew. So did the prophets Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi, who prophesied several years after the return from the Babylonish captivity; which shows, that the Hebrew language was still in use, and was understood by many of the people. The same thing may be concluded from this: that all the sacred books that were written after the captivity were written in Hebrew, except a part of Ezra and Daniel. Nehemiah, who had been a great man in the Persian court, wrote his own memoirs in Hebrew; which shows, that the Jews who continued in Persia, their great men at least, still retained the knowledge of that language. And as the Hebrew language was not absolutely forgotten among the Jews in their captivity, so neither were their sacred books entirely lost. Indeed it were absurd to suppose it. That captivity, though it lasted seventy years from the first beginning of it under Jehoiakim, yet from the time of the utter desolation of Jerusalem, and the temple, and the carrying away the last remainder of the people to Babylon, continued but about fifty years. And there were not a few of them that had been carried away from Jerusalem, who survived the whole time, and lived to come back. "Many of the priests and Levites, and chief of the fathers, who were ancient men, that had seen the first house, when the foundation of the second

* Works, vol. i. p. 84.

† Ibid. p. 101.

‡ Ibid. p. 85.

house was laid before their eyes, wept with a loud voice." Ezra iii. 12. All those among them that lived to seventy or eighty years were twenty or thirty years old when Jerusalem and the temple were destroyed; and to suppose, that these should entirely forget their language, or their religion, history, and laws, is very absurd; add to this, that the people were in expectation of a deliverance, and restitution to their own land, of which the prophets had assured them; and this would naturally make them more careful to preserve their laws, and the ancient authentic records and memorials of their nation. It appeareth from the accounts given of those that returned, that many of the priests, the Levites, the singers, the porters, the Nethinims, &c. had preserved their genealogies during the captivity, in prospect of their return, and of their being again employed in the sacred functions; and those who could not clearly show their genealogies, were put from the priesthood, Ezra ii. 62. Neh. vii. 64. Great numbers of the people could also prove their genealogies; and where there were any that could not do this, it is particularly taken notice of, that "they could not show their father's house," Ezra ii. 59. It is manifest therefore, that there were *registers* of genealogies preserved in Babylon; and is it not reasonable to conclude, that they would be no less careful to preserve their sacred books, especially those of Moses, in which were their original records, and the laws on which their whole constitution depended?

If the Jews had been for changing their own laws and customs, we may suppose it must have been in order to their adopting those of their conquerors, and of the country to which they were transplanted, and in which they settled. But it is evident, that, in fact, they did not do this: since the whole system of their worship and constitution was, upon their return, very different from that of the Babylonians. If therefore they learned their language, or used their letters and characters in writing; yet still it is certain, that they worshipped not their gods, nor adopted their religion, and sacred rites. They still preserved their own; and the captivity and desolation of their nation, which they looked upon as a punishment for their manifold revolts, idolatries, and deviations from their law, tended to increase, instead of extinguishing, their veneration for it.

By Daniel's solemn supplication and fasting, when the time came that had been marked out in the prophecies for their return, it appeareth, that he had the book of Jeremiah's prophecies before him, Dan. ix. 2. And the confession he there maketh is remarkable: *All Israel have transgressed thy law, therefore the curse is come upon us; and the oath that is written in the law of Moses, the servant of God, because we have sinned against him: and he hath confirmed his words which he spake against us, and against our judges that judged us. As it is written in the law of Moses, all this evil is come upon us,* ver. 11, 12, 13. Here it is plainly supposed, that there was a written law of Moses extant in his time, known to him and to the people, and which was regarded as the law of God himself: that they had transgressed that law, and thereby had exposed themselves to the dreadful judgment denounced against them, and

written in that law, as the just punishment of their revolt and disobedience. Soon after this, when the people returned, under the conduct of Zerubbabel, Jeshua, and others, we find them gathered together to celebrate the feast of tabernacles, in the seventh month, and offering the *daily burnt offerings*, and those of the *new moons*, and *set feasts*, besides *free-will offerings*: and all of this is said to be done as *written in the law of Moses*, Ezra iii. 1—6: and this plainly sheweth, that they had the written law of Moses with them. They also appointed the priests and Levites, in their several courses, and the singers, and service of the temple, *according to the ordinances of David, the man of God*, Ezra iii. 10, 11. The sacred hymns or psalms, therefore, that had been used in the temple worship, were not lost in the captivity; and indeed the Psalms of David carry evident characters of genuineness in them. They were many of them composed on special occasions, and adapted to his peculiar circumstances, in a manner which plainly showed they were not forged in after-times. And the preserving so many of the psalms and hymns, some of which contain an abridgment of their sacred history, is a manifest indication of the care they took; and that there was not a general destruction of their sacred books in the captivity. The same observation may be applied to the prophetic writings, and to their sacred records. It is plain, that the history of their kings was preserved; to which there is frequent reference in the books compiled after the Babylonish captivity.

The commission afterwards given to Ezra by Artaxerxes, plainly supposed the law of Moses to be then in being, and in the highest authority; and only empowered him to regulate every thing according to that law. He is described in Artaxerxes's commission as *a ready scribe in the law of Moses*: as one greatly skilled in that law, and fit to instruct others in it; and is required to set magistrates and judges to judge the people, such as *knew the law of God*, Ezra vii. 6. 10. 25. Soon after Ezra came Nehemiah, a great man in the Persian court, and who was appointed governor of Judea; and every thing throughout his book discovereth, that he and the whole people professed the highest veneration for the law of Moses. Before he came to Judea, he was well acquainted with that law, and regarded it as of divine authority, Neh. i. 7, 8, 9. During his administration, we have an account of a solemn reading of the law, by Ezra, in the hearing of all the people; who heard it with the utmost reverence and attention: in this he was assisted by several Levites, who *read in the book, in the law of God, distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading*, Neh. viii. 1—9. Again, we are told of another solemn reading of the law, before all the people, Neh. ix. 1, 2, 3. And in the admirable confession made on that occasion by the Levites, there is an excellent summary of the principal events recorded in the historical parts of the books of Moses; such as the calling of Abraham; their bondage and oppression in Egypt; their being brought out from thence with signs and wonders, and dreadful judgments executed upon Pharaoh and his people; the dividing of the sea before them, so that they

passed through it as on dry land, whilst the Egyptians that pursued them were overwhelmed in the deep; the promulgation of the law at Sinai, with remarkable tokens of the divine presence and glory; the miracles wrought in the wilderness, the leading them by a cloud in the day, and a pillar of fire by night; the giving them manna bread from heaven to eat, and cleaving the rock to give them water to drink: and finally, bringing them into possession of the land of Canaan. These things, which are the most remarkable facts in the history of their nation, together with their frequent rebellions, disobedience, and ingratitude, particularly their making and worshipping the molten calf in the wilderness, the standing disgrace of their nation, and their subsequent revolts, calamities, and deliverances, after they came into the land of Canaan, are there taken notice of in the public confessions and acknowledgments made to God in the name and presence of all the people; and are mentioned as things commonly known and acknowledged among them, and as of undoubted truth and certainty.

Taking these things together, it seems to appear, with all the evidence which the nature of the thing is capable of, that the Jewish sacred books and records were not lost in the Babylonish captivity; that they were in possession of them, and held them in great veneration, before Ezra came to Jerusalem: and it would be a wild imagination to suppose, that he had it in his power, even if he had it in his inclination, so far to impose upon all the Jews, both those in Judea, and those that continued in Babylon, and other parts of the Persian empire, as to make them all with one consent receive those for their ancient laws, by which their nation had been always governed, which were not their ancient laws; and those for their ancient authentic histories, and sacred records, which were not the ancient authentic records. All that his commission from Artaxerxes extended to, was, to order things according to the law of Moses; and this he effected. When he came, he found several abuses contrary to that law, countenanced by men of great power and interest, and in which several of the chief priests, as well as numbers of the people, were engaged; and he set himself to reform them according to that law; and these regulations would not have been tamely submitted to, if it had not been well known, that the laws and constitutions he urged upon them, were the true original laws of Moses.

As to the establishing the sacred canon, which is attributed to Ezra, and to those whom the Jews call the men of the great synagogue, the last of whom was Simon the Just, this is not to be understood as if these books were not accounted sacred, or were regarded as of no authority before. The books were already well known, and looked upon as sacred: they had not their authority, because Ezra acknowledged them: but he collected and published them, because they were known to be authentic. It may indeed be well supposed, that faults and variations might have crept into the copies of those books, and that they needed to be carefully revised: and this was a work for which Ezra was admirably fitted, by his

great skill in the law, and in the sacred records of his nation, as well as his noted integrity. And if he accordingly revised the original sacred books, and published a more correct edition of them, or abridged some of their ancient records, to render them of more general use among the people, and here and there inserted some passages, for explaining and illustrating things that were grown obscure; this was certainly a work of great use. And supposing him to have done this, and that this work continued to be afterwards carried on by some of the most knowing and excellent men of their nation, till it was with great care completed, I do not see how it in the least affects the authority or credibility of those books. The whole nation in general were so sensible of Ezra's great fidelity and diligence, that he was always afterwards had in the highest honour: and they were so convinced that these were the original sacred books, that they received them with an extraordinary veneration. Nor did they ever pay the same regard to any other subsequent writings in their own nation: and though the Sanhedrim continued to have great authority among them, they never pretended to put any other books upon them as divine, or as of equal authority with the sacred books. Now how comes it, that they put so great a difference between them, and that the authority of these books was universally acknowledged by the whole nation, and the other not? This sheweth, that however credulous the Jews might be in other things, yet they were particularly exact and scrupulous in not receiving any books into the sacred canon, but what they judged they had good reason to look upon as authentic.

The most remarkable part of the Jewish history is, that which is contained in the books of Moses. It is there we have an account of the first constitution of their sacred polity; the promulgation of the ten commandments, with the most amazing demonstrations of a divine power and majesty; and the extraordinary miraculous facts done in Egypt and in the wilderness, by which the authority of that law was established. And whosoever alloweth this part of the Jewish history to be authentic, will not much scruple the subsequent parts of their history. Now it is evident, that as it was not Ezra that gave authority to the law of Moses, which was in the highest authority before, or who caused the people to receive it as divine; so neither were the *facts*, whereby the authority of that law was attested, *first* published by him. They had been all along believed, and the remembrance of them kept up, among the people. *The books of Moses* exhibit a remarkable intermixture of *laws* and *facts*: and it appears to have been so from the beginning, though our author insinuates the contrary, but gives no reason for it.* And it was wisely ordered, that the facts should go along with the laws; several of which suppose those facts, and have a manifest relation to them. And as the laws were received with great veneration, so the facts were equally received and believed among the people, in all ages, from the time in which those laws were given.

* Works, vol. i. p. 100.

And it deserveth to be remarked, that the facts were of such a kind, that they could not have been imposed upon the people, however stupid we suppose them to have been, at the time the laws were given, if they had not been true. If Moses had only told the Israelites, as Mahomet did the Arabians, instead of working miracles before them, as they demanded, of a journey he made to heaven, where he received the law: or as Numa did the ancient Romans, of conferences he had with the goddess Egeria in a wood or grove, to which no other persons were witnesses, and which depended entirely upon his own word; this might have administered ground of suspicion, that he only feigned a divine commission, the more effectually to enforce his laws upon an ignorant and superstitious people. But he took a quite different method. The facts he relateth, and upon the credit of which the divine authority of his laws is rested, were of a most public nature, done in open view before the people, of which they were all said to be witnesses, and in which therefore, if they had not been true, it would have been the easiest thing in the world to have detected him. And indeed, considering the stubborn disposition of the people, and their great proneness to idolatry, it can scarcely be conceived, that they would have received or submitted to such a law and constitution, if they themselves had not been assured of the truth of those facts whereby the divinity of it was confirmed. In the admirable recapitulation of the law, contained in the book of Deuteronomy, which carrieth as strong evidences of genuine *antiquity*, *simplicity*, and *integrity*, as any writings can possibly have, and in which he delivereth himself with an inimitable gravity, dignity, and authority, mixed with the most affectionate tenderness and concern, as becometh the lawgiver and father of his people, and exhorteth them to the observance of the law in the most pathetic and engaging manner; there is a constant reference to the great and extraordinary facts wrought in Egypt, and in the wilderness; an appeal is made to the people concerning them, as things which they themselves had seen and known. And never was there greater care taken to preserve a remembrance of any laws and facts than there was of these. He delivered the book of the law, containing an account both of laws and facts, not only to the *priests*, but to *the elders of Israel*, the heads of the several tribes, before his death: and the original of the law was deposited in the sides of the ark, in the most holy place. A most solemn charge was laid upon the people, in the name of God, as they valued his favour, and their own happiness, frequently to consider those laws and facts themselves, and to teach them diligently to their children. Sacred rites were instituted, and public festivals appointed, to preserve the memorials of the principal facts, from the time in which those facts were done. And accordingly the remembrance of them was constantly preserved among them in all ages. In all the succeeding monuments of their nation, throughout their whole history, and in their devotional and prophetic writings, and in their public solemn forms of confession and thanksgiving, there was still a constant reference to those facts as of undoubted credit; and upon the credit of

those facts, those laws were both at first received, and continued afterwards to be acknowledged and submitted to: for notwithstanding the frequent defections of the people to the idolatrous rites and customs of the neighbouring nations, yet they never totally and universally apostatised from the law of Moses, but still acknowledged its sacredness and divine authority.*

The author of these Letters taketh particular notice of the fables invented by the Hellenistic Jews, to authorize the Greek version of the Hebrew Scriptures.† But I do not see how any argument can be fairly drawn from these fables to the prejudice of the sacred books themselves, which were thus translated, or to destroy their authority or credibility. The strong persuasion they had of the divine authority of the original Scriptures, might make the Jews at Alexandria more ready to entertain stories in favour of the translation of these Scriptures into Greek, from which they found great benefit; this being the language they best understood, and which was then become of general use. But those stories were not generally received by the Jewish nation, though they all universally agreed in acknowledging the authority of the originals; nor were they ever inserted in the sacred writings, or in any books, the authority of which was generally received among them.

The first thing that gave rise to those stories was, the history of Aristæas; which seems to have been contrived on purpose to do honour to that version, and gives a pompous account of it. And yet even in that history there is nothing said of those miraculous circumstances, which were afterwards invented to show, that those interpreters were under an extraordinary divine guidance. On the contrary, that book, though it be the foundation of all that is said concerning the Septuagint, may be proved to be plainly inconsistent with those subsequent fables and fictions, and is sufficient to detect the falsity of them. There is therefore no parallel at all between these Hellenistical fables, and the sacred Hebrew records; except it could be proved, that one part of those ancient records is inconsistent with other subsequent parts of them, and furnishes manifest proofs of their falsehood; which neither his Lordship, nor any other, has been able to show.

Another argument, on which he seems to lay a mighty stress, in order to set aside the authority of the Scripture, is drawn from the accidents that have happened to the sacred text. He will not allow the answer made by Abbadié and others, that "such accidents could not have been prevented without a perpetual standing miracle, and that a perpetual standing miracle is not in the order of Providence." On the contrary, it seems evident to him, that if the

* That the law of Moses, with the facts there recorded, may be traced, from the time in which that law was given, and the facts done, through all the succeeding ages of the Jewish nation; and that we have all the evidence of their having been transmitted without any material corruption or alteration, that can be reasonably desired; I have elsewhere more fully shown, in the *Answer to Christianity as old as the Creation*, vol. ii. chap. 4.

• Works, vol. i. p. 85, 86.

Scriptures had been originally given by divine inspiration, "either such accidents would not have happened, or the Scriptures would have been preserved entirely in their genuine purity, notwithstanding these accidents." He thinks the proof of this "is obvious and easy, according to our clearest and most distinct ideas of wisdom, and moral fitness."* But besides that the present question, as he has managed it, relating to the sacred history, is not about the divine inspiration of it, but whether it be a true and faithful history, an honest and credible relation of facts, which he absolutely denies; I see no consequence at all in his way of reasoning, even if the question were, whether those sacred books were originally written by persons divinely inspired. For all that could be reasonably concluded, supposing any books to have been originally given by divine inspiration, is, that Providence would take care, that those books should be transmitted with a sufficient degree of certainty and integrity, to answer the end for which they were originally intended. But it was no-way necessary to this purpose, that all the transcribers that should ever copy these writings in any age or nation, should be under an infallible guidance, so as to be kept by an extraordinary interposition from ever committing any mistake or blunder, or being guilty of any slips or negligences; or that all those that have ever revised and compared those copies, should, in every instance, be infallibly guided in their judgments concerning them. This is evidently absurd. It would be multiplying miracles without necessity, and would therefore be unworthy of the divine wisdom, and not very consistent with the methods of God's moral government of men, considered as reasonable creatures, free agents. For, will any man, in good earnest, undertake to prove, that supposing an excellent revelation given, of doctrines, laws, &c. together with authentic accounts of extraordinary facts, tending to confirm and establish the divine authority of those doctrines and laws, this revelation could not be of any use, nor could those accounts of facts be at all fit to be depended on, if there were any variations, omissions, transpositions, or mistakes, in any copies of them that should be taken of them in any age? If, notwithstanding those variations, the copies should still so far agree, that from thence a sufficient notion might be formed of the doctrines and laws contained in that original revelation, and of the truth of the facts whereby it was attested and confirmed, this would be sufficient to answer the end which we might suppose the divine wisdom to have had in view in giving such a revelation. And this is actually the case with regard to the holy Scriptures. Whatever *additions, interpolations, or transpositions*, may be supposed to have crept into any of the copies, yet all the main laws and facts are still preserved. Of this we have a remarkable proof, by comparing the Hebrew and Samaritan codes of the Pentateuch. There are differences between them: but the laws, the precepts, the history, the important facts, whereby the law was attested, are the same in both. And in general it may be justly

* Works, vol. i. p. 95.

affirmed, that notwithstanding all the differences in the copies, about which such a clamour has been raised, yet there is a sufficient agreement among them to satisfy us, that such and such laws were originally given, such prophecies were delivered, and that such facts were done: and the variations among the copies in smaller matters, the mistakes that have crept into the genealogies, numbers, dates, catalogues of names, ages of some of the patriarchs, and the like (for it is in these things that the differences principally lie), do really confirm their harmony in the main; and therefore are far from destroying the authority of the sacred writings, or the credibility of the scripture history.

The learned Capellus, who had thoroughly considered this matter, and who, it is well known, allowed himself great liberties in judging concerning the variations in the copies of the Hebrew Scriptures, justly observeth, in his defence of his *Critica Sacra*, that all these variations are of little or no moment as to faith or manners; so that in that respect it is indifferent which reading we follow: *Sane omnes illæ varietates, uti sapius in Critica Sacra repeto, nullius aut penè nullius sunt quoad fidem et mores momenti, ut eo respectu perinde sit hanc an illam sequaris lectionem.* And I believe there are few competent and impartial judges of these things, but will be ready to own, with M. Le Clerc, the freedom of whose judgment in such matters must be acknowledged, that, through the good providence of God, no books from the earliest antiquity, have come to us equally correct with the sacred books of the Hebrews, particularly the Masoretical copies. *Nullos libros ex ultima antiquitate ad nos, Dei beneficio, pervenisse æquè emendatos ac sacros Hebræorum codices, et quidem Masoreticos.* See his *Dissertatio de Lingua Hebræa*, prefixed to his *Commentary on the Pentateuch*.

What our author himself maketh a show of granting is very true, that—"amidst all the changes and chances to which the books, in which they are recorded, have been exposed, neither original writers nor later compilers, have been suffered to make any essential alterations, such as would have falsified the law of God, and the principles of the Jewish and Christian religion, in any of those divine fundamental points."* And indeed the precepts, the doctrines of religion inculcated in the Scriptures of the Old Testament, are so frequently repeated, and the principal facts there related are so often referred to, in different parts of those sacred volumes, as to be abundantly sufficient to answer the design for which they were originally intended; viz. to instruct men in the knowledge, adoration, and obedience of the one true God, and to engage them to the practice of righteousness, and to prepare the way for a more perfect dispensation, which was to be introduced, in the fulness of time, by that Divine Person, whose *coming, character, offices, sufferings, glory, and kingdom*, were there prefigured and foretold. Accordingly our Saviour speaketh of the writings of Moses and the Prophets, as of signal use to instruct and direct men in the knowledge and practice

* Works, vol. i. p. 97, 98.

of religion, Luke xvi. 29, 30, 31. And though it be not true, which our author asserteth, that the Jewish Scriptures had no authority but what they derived from Christianity (for they had an authority founded upon sufficient credentials before Christianity was established); yet their being acknowledged as divine by Christ and his apostles, giveth them a farther confirmation; for when a subsequent revelation, which is itself founded on convincing proofs and evidences, giveth testimony to a prior revelation, and referreth to it as of divine authority; when both together concur to form one system of religion, and to exhibit the history of God's various dispensations towards his church, the former being subservient and preparatory to the latter, and the latter giving farther light and a fuller completion to the former; this confirmeth the authority of both, and sheweth one great uniform design and plan carried on by the divine wisdom and goodness from the beginning.

It is no just objection against the authority of the sacred books of the Old Testament, though the writer of these letters seems to think it so, that "though Jews and Christians hold the same books in great veneration, yet each condemns the other for not understanding, or for abusing, them."* This is to be understood, not of the sacred history, which yet he would be thought to have particularly in view: for, as to this, the Jews and Christians are generally agreed; but of some passages in the prophetic writings, in the interpretation of which they differ. And with respect to these, it may be observed, that if the Jews, at the time of our Saviour's appearing, had universally interpreted the prophetic writings as the Christians do, and applied them to Jesus Christ; and had accordingly turned Christians, and embraced Jesus as the Messiah promised to their fathers; it would undoubtedly have been alleged, that they forged or corrupted the prophecies in favour of the Christian system; whereas now there is no room for this pretence. Their vouching and acknowledging those writings, as of divine authority, notwithstanding the difficulty they have been put to in answering the arguments brought from thence against their own favourite notions and prejudices, giveth their testimony to the prophetic books great force.

There is another remarkable passage in his third letter, which it is proper to take some notice of. He observes,† that "the Jews and Christians differ among themselves, and from one another, concerning almost every point that is necessary to be known and agreed upon, in order to establish the authority of books which both have received as authentic and sacred. Who were the authors of these scriptures, when they were published, how they were composed, and preserved, or renewed; in fine, how they were lost during the captivity, and how they were retrieved after it; are all matters of controversy to this day." That the sacred books were *not lost* in the captivity, and that consequently they were *not retrieved* after it by immediate inspiration, hath been clearly shown; a fiction which

* Works, vol. i. p. 92.

† Ibid. p. 100, 101.

seems to have had its rise from the apocryphal second book of Esdras, the authority of which never was acknowledged either in the Jewish or Christian church. There are indeed differences, both among Jews and Christians, concerning several points relating to these sacred books; but these differences are, for the most part, about things that do not properly concern the divine authority or credibility of those writings. There is a general agreement among them, that the prophetic books were writings by persons divinely inspired; and that the Pentateuch was written by Moses, the greatest of all the prophets; and that the historical writings were either the very original authentic records, or faithfully compiled out of them; and were received and acknowledged by the whole nation, as containing true and just accounts of facts. And whereas he urgeth, that it is matter of controversy, who were the authors of those scriptures or, when they were composed or published; it is certain, that, with respect to the much greater part of the sacred books, both Jews and Christians are generally agreed who were the authors of them.

This is true concerning all the writings of the prophets, the books of Solomon, most of the Psalms, the *five books* of Moses, which have been constantly received by the Jewish and Christian church, in all ages, as written by Moses; though a few in these latter times have attempted to contest it. The books of Ezra, Nehemiah, and Daniel, seem plainly to show their authors; and concerning all these, there has been a general agreement. The books therefore, concerning the authors of which there is properly any ground of controversy, are the historical books of Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings, and Chronicles. As to the first of these, viz. the book of Joshua, the ancient Jews in general, and the greater part of Christian writers, with good reason, look upon it to have been written by Joshua himself; though there are some particular passages in it that were inserted afterwards, by way of illustration. It is principally concerning the books of Judges, Samuel, Kings, and Chronicles, that there is any colourable pretence for saying with our author, that they were "abridgements of old records made in later times."* Some of them seem plainly to have been compiled after the return from the Babylonish captivity, probably by Ezra, from ancient authentic records, which are frequently quoted and referred to in them, as books of acknowledged credit and authority; so that there is little room to doubt of the truth and certainty of the accounts there given. For that they were faithfully extracted from those original records, to which they refer for a larger account of the things there related, there is the highest reason to believe. And it was wisely ordered, that these shorter accounts should be inserted in the sacred canon, when it was to be brought, as it were, into one volume, for the lasting instruction and edification of the church. For as the sacred history was intended not merely to gratify curiosity, but to promote the purposes of religion, piety, and virtue, and to keep up the remembrance of the

* Works, vol. i. p. 96.

remarkable actings of divine providence towards them, both in a way of mercy and judgment, according to their behaviour, it was proper that it should be brought into as narrow a compass as was consistent with that design. This would make it more generally known and easily remembered; whereas larger and more particular accounts might have been too voluminous for a book designed for universal use.

The only thing that yet remaineth to be considered, with regard to the sacred books of the Old Testament, is, what he saith concerning the *curse* pronounced upon Canaan by Noah; of which we have an account, Gen. ix. 24, 25, 26, 27. This he seems to have fixed upon as one of the properest instances he could find to expose the authority of the scripture. He treateth it as an invention of the writer to justify the Israelites in their invasion of the Canaanites, and representeth this curse as *contradicting all our notions of order and justice*. "One is tempted to think," says he, "that the patriarch was still drunk, and that no man in his senses could hold such language, or pass such a sentence. Certain it is, that no writer but a Jew could impute to the economy of Providence the accomplishment of such a prediction, nor make the Supreme Being the executor of such a curse."

His Lordship observes, that, "Ham alone offended; Canaan was innocent—Canaan was however alone cursed, and became, according to his grandfather's prophecy, a *servant of servants*, i. e. the vilest and meanest of slaves—to Shem, not to Japheth, when the Israelites conquered Palestine; to one of his uncles, not to his brethren. Will it be said—it has been said—that where we read *Canaan* we are to understand *Ham*, whose brethren Shem and Japheth were? At this rate, we shall never know what we read; as these critics never care what they say. Will it be said—this has been said too—that Ham was punished in his posterity, when Canaan was cursed, and his descendants were exterminated? But who does not see, that the curse and punishment in this case fell on Canaan and his posterity, exclusive of the rest of the posterity of Ham; and were therefore the curse and punishment of the son, not of the father properly? The descendants of Misraim, another of his sons, were the Egyptians; and they were so far from being servants of servants to their cousins the Shemites, that these were servants of servants unto them, during more than fourscore years. Why the posterity of Canaan was to be deemed an accursed race, it is easy to account; and I have mentioned it just now; but it is not so easy to account why the posterity of the righteous Shem, that great example of filial reverence, became slaves to another branch of the family of Ham."*

Before I proceed to a distinct consideration of what Lord Bolingbroke hath offered, it will be proper to lay before the reader the sacred text, as it is in our translation, Gen. ix. 21—27. "Noah—was uncovered within his tent: and Ham, the father of Canaan, saw the nakedness of his father, and told his two brethren without.

* Works, vol. i. p. 110, 111, 112.

And Shem and Japheth took a garment, and laid it upon both their shoulders, and went backward, and covered the nakedness of their father; and their faces were backward, and they saw not their father's nakedness. And Noah awoke from his wine, and knew what his younger son had done unto him. And he said, Cursed be Canaan; a servant of servants shall he be unto his brethren. And he said, Blessed be the Lord God of Shem, and Canaan shall be his servant. God shall enlarge Japheth, and he shall dwell in the tents of Shem: and Canaan shall be his servant."

It is acknowledged, that there is a considerable difficulty in this passage. And if we were not able to account for it at all at this distance, it would be much more reasonable to suppose, that some circumstances have been passed by in this short narrative, which, if known, would help to clear it; or that there may have been some defects in the copies, not now to be remedied; than, upon the account of one difficult and obscure passage, to throw off all regard to writings, which have the most just pretensions both to the greatest antiquity and most venerable authority.

But that the difficulties which his Lordship hath urged are far from being unanswerable, will appear from the following observations.

First, The foundation of the whole charge, and that upon which the greatest stress is laid, is this, that "Ham alone offended: Canaan was innocent. Canaan however was alone cursed; and he became, according to his grandfather's prophecy, a servant of servants, i. e. the vilest and worst of slaves." Some learned persons have supposed, that where the curse is pronounced upon Canaan, ver. 25. the word *ABA*, *father*, is to be understood, which is expressly mentioned, ver. 22.; and that instead of *Cursed be Canaan*, it should be read, *Cursed be Ham, the father of Canaan*. And though Lord Bolingbroke speaks of this with great contempt, there are instances of such ellipses or omissions to be found in some other passages of Scripture. A remarkable one of this kind is in 2 Sam. xxi. 19. where our translation has it, that "Elhanan—slew the brother of Goliath the Gittite, the staff of whose spear was like a weaver's beam;" which is certainly right, as appears from the nature of the thing, and from a parallel passage, 1 Chron. xx. 5. where he is expressly called "the brother of Goliath the Gittite, &c." But the word *brother* is not in our present copies of the original, in 2 Sam. xxi. 19. where it runs thus, "Elhanan—slew Goliath the Gittite, &c." instead of "the brother of Goliath the Gittite." In like manner the word *father* may be supplied here, as well as the word *brother* in the place now mentioned; so that for *Cursed be Canaan*, it may be read, *Cursed be Ham, the father of Canaan*. So the Arabic reads it, and so Vatablus renders it. And it is followed by other learned writers, particularly by the Bishop of Clogher, in his "Vindication of the Histories of the Old and New Testament." But if that be not admitted, as not only the Hebrew, but the Samaritan, the Septuagint, and all the ancient versions, except the Arabic, which is a

no great authority, read as we do,* this will not prove, either that Canaan was entirely innocent, or that he alone was cursed. The Jews are generally of opinion, in which they follow a very ancient tradition, that Canaan was the first that saw Noah's nakedness, and made a jest of it to his father, Ham; who, instead of reproving him, went himself to see it, and in a mocking way told it to his brothers, Shem and Japheth. Lord Bolingbroke makes mention of this, and endeavoureth to obviate it by observing, that "the Hebrew and other doctors, who would make the son an accomplice with his father, affirm not only without, but against the express authority of the text." This is confidently said. But if the text doth not expressly mention Canaan as an accomplice, neither can it be said,

* It may be justly laid down as a rule, not to be lightly departed from, that where the Hebrew and Samaritan, and best ancient versions, agree in any reading, that reading is not to be altered or given up without necessity; and I cannot see any necessity in the present case. There are few readings that have a more general consent in their favour, than that which our translators have followed in the passage before us. Not only the Hebrew and Samaritan, but the Septuagint, in those copies that are of the greatest authority, particularly in the Roman and Alexandrian, to which may be added the Complutensian, and many others, and the remains of Origen's Hexapla, collected by Montfaucon, the Targums, both of Onkelos and Ben Uzziel, the Syriac, the vulgar Latin, agree in it. There are indeed some copies of the Septuagint which read *Ham* instead of *Canaan*; and so it was in the first Venetian edition; but it appears to me, that both in those copies of the Septuagint, and in the Arabic, this reading is rather an interpolation, inserted for avoiding the difficulty, than to have been a version taken from the original. And it may more easily be accounted for, why Ham's name should be afterwards inserted in the text, than why it should have been dropped or omitted, supposing it to have been expressly mentioned in the original. Nor is it likely that that omission should have been repeated three times together in the compass of three or four lines.

If the present reading be at all altered, that reading which puts the least force upon the text is, that which instead of *Canaan* substitutes *Ham, the father of Canaan*. But it does not seem to me very likely, that Ham should be so often over described under the character of the *father of Canaan* in so short a prediction. At least it does not seem to me probable that Noah himself, in pronouncing it, should three times over characterise Ham as the *father of Canaan*. Let any man read over the prediction with this addition so often repeated, and see if it has not an odd appearance. If it be said, that it was Moses himself, who, in repeating Noah's malediction against Ham, added this of his being the *father of Canaan*, to put the Israelites in mind that Canaan was the offspring of accursed Ham; even in this view the so frequent repetition seems to be needless. The sacred historian had in the 18th verse of this chapter observed, that Ham was the *father of Canaan*; and again, in the 22nd verse, in entering upon this narration, he had characterised Ham as the *father of Canaan*. The mention of this was certainly very proper in the beginning of the account, on supposition that Canaan was concerned with his father Ham in that affair, and also to prepare the reader for the distinct mention of Canaan, in the prediction which was pronounced upon occasion of Ham's wickedness. But this being done, it does not seem likely that Moses should think it necessary, in recounting that short prediction, to repeat it so often over, that Ham was the *father of Canaan*.

Besides, it seems to me to be of some weight, that if that be admitted to be the original reading, Canaan is not directly pointed out in the prediction at all. The being the *servant of servants*, and *servant* both to Shem and Japheth, is not in that case said of Canaan, but of Ham. At the most it is only insinuated, by calling Ham the *father of Canaan*, that Canaan might be involved in the curse, as one of Ham's sons; but it is not expressly applied to him. Whereas in the common reading it contains a manifest prediction of the curse and servitude as relating to Canaan. And this was a very good reason for Moses' taking care to record it. It is not improbable, that Noah might have said more on that occasion than is mentioned; but Moses contented himself with recording that part of the prediction or prophetic curse which related to Canaan; as it was that which more immediately answered his design, and which it most nearly concerned the Israelites to know.

that the authority of the text is expressly against that notion. On the contrary, whosoever impartially examineth the story as there related, will be naturally led to believe, that Canaan was in some degree accessory to his father's crime. Ham is in this story particularly characterised as the *father of Canaan*, and Canaan being so often mentioned affordeth a plain intimation, that he was some way or other concerned, and might either be the first that saw his grandfather's nakedness, and acquainted his father with it, or might be with his father when he saw it, and joined with him in making a mock of it. But as Ham was Canaan's father, from whom better might have been expected, considering his age, and the dutiful regard he owed to his father, Noah, with whom he had been saved from the deluge, he alone is expressly mentioned in this short narration; though the curse pronounced upon Canaan leads us to think, that he was some way partaker of his father's crime. And supposing this to be so, and that he was Ham's favourite son, and like him in his dispositions, the curse pronounced upon him was really intended against both. If we met with the same account in any wise and credible historian, this is the construction we should have been apt to put upon it, that both Canaan and his father were concerned in the affair. And it is no very unusual thing in Scripture, and in other histories too, to omit some circumstances in a short narration, which are plainly implied, and which the reader is left to collect. Indeed, if what some expositors suppose be admitted, it is not only implied in the text that Canaan was an accomplice, but is expressly signified in those words, ver. 24. that *Noah knew what his younger son had done unto him*. Where by *younger son*, they understand his grandson; for a grandson, according to the Hebrew idiom, may be properly called a son; and they think Ham was not the youngest of Noah's sons, but the middlemost, according to the order in which he is always placed, Shem, Ham, and Japheth; so Theodoret and Drusius, after some of the Hebrew writers, with whom agrees bishop Patrick. But whatever becomes of this conjecture, and though we should suppose Ham to be here intended by *the younger son*, (which he might really be, though mentioned between Shem and Japheth, since the order of their birth and age is not designed to be signified by it; for Japheth was the eldest, Gen. x. 21.) Yet still the strain of the story seems to imply, that Canaan had a guilty part in it, who alone of all Ham's sons is expressly mentioned upon this occasion.

But secondly. Let us suppose that Canaan was innocent, and no way accessory to this particular instance of Ham's impiety and wickedness, the prophetic curse and prediction may notwithstanding this be fairly accounted for. It must be said in that case, that the curse was not properly pronounced upon Canaan for Ham's crime, but that, upon occasion of Ham's wickedness, Noah foretold the miseries and calamities that should befall his posterity, and particularly his descendants by Canaan. And supposing Noah to have been then enabled by a prophetic spirit to foresee, that from Ham would proceed a profligate and impious race, like him in wicked-

ness, and whose crimes would at length bring down the vengeance of heaven upon them, and subject them to the basest servitude and punishment, his mentioning it on this occasion, and pointing to that branch of his posterity on whom this curse should particularly fall, had a manifest propriety in it. This could not but greatly humble Ham, and had a tendency to cause him to reflect on his own wickedness, and affect him with sorrow and remorse on the account of it, if any thing could do it. For who that has the bowels of the human nature, would not be greatly affected at the thought, that his posterity should be infamous and abandoned, and among the most wretched of the human race? And though Canaan alone be mentioned in this short account, it doth not follow that no other of Ham's posterity fell under the curse. Noah might have named others of Ham's sons or descendants, though Moses only takes notice of what related to Canaan, because this was what more especially concerned the people of Israel to know.

This leads me to observe,

Thirdly, That as to the insinuation that this prophecy or prediction was feigned to justify the cruelties exercised by Joshua upon the Canaanites,* it is the author's own groundless suspicion, without producing any proof of it. Supposing it to have been a real prophecy originally delivered by Noah, the tradition of which had been preserved in the family of Shem, and which was transmitted by Abraham, who might have had it from Shem himself, to his descendants, it is easily accounted for that Moses should take care to commit it to writing. Nor will it be denied, that one end he might have in view in recording it, was to encourage and animate the Israelites, as he knew the time was at hand for the accomplishment of that prediction, and that the Israelites were to be the instruments of it. Such a true prophecy, known to have proceeded originally from Noah, was much more likely to answer Moses's end, than if it had been a mere fiction of his own, which had never been heard of before. And that Moses did not feign this prophecy may be justly concluded, because, if it had been invented by himself purely to bring an odium upon Canaan and his descendants, the story would probably have been contrived otherwise than it is. It would have been pretended, not that Ham, but that Canaan had been guilty of that impiety and irreverence towards Noah, the second father of mankind, and repairer of the world, and who was had in great veneration. Thus would Moses have laid it, if the whole had been his own fiction. He would not have contented himself with leaving the reader to collect from the story that Canaan was some way faulty, but would have taken care to have made it more directly answer his purpose, by expressly charging the crime upon Canaan himself. But as it was a real prophecy of Noah, Moses gave it as he had received it, without altering the original story, or adding new circumstances.

* Lord Bolingbroke, in other parts of his works, frequently insists upon these cruelties, as a demonstration that the Mosaic constitution could not be of divine original. See this fully examined, *View of the Deistical Writers*, p. 440, et seq.

This leads me to a fourth observation upon this remarkable passage, viz.

That if rightly understood, instead of furnishing a just objection against the authority of Scripture, it rather confirmeth it, and should increase our veneration for it. For we have here a most remarkable prophecy, which extended to events at the distance of many ages, and hath been wonderfully fulfilled in all its parts. It is manifest, that what is here foretold concerning Canaan, Shem, and Japheth, relateth to them, not merely considered in their own persons, but to their offspring, in whom it was chiefly to receive its accomplishment: and the blessings pronounced by Isaac upon Jacob and Esau, and afterwards by Jacob upon his twelve sons, though applied to them by name, were principally to be understood of their descendants. Taking it in this view, the prophecy here pronounced by Noah is of a great extent. The blessings which should attend Shem is foretold, and it is intimated that God would be in a special manner his God, and would pour forth so many blessings upon his posterity, as would lay a foundation for praises and thanksgivings; so that whosoever observed it, should have reason to say, "Blessed be the Lord God of Shem." And this was signally fulfilled; since among his posterity the knowledge and worship of the true God was preserved, when the rest of the world was deeply immersed in idolatry; and from his seed the great Messiah sprung. It was also foretold, that "God should enlarge Japheth:" and accordingly his posterity wonderfully increased, and spread through a great part of the world. Bochart and others have observed, that not only all Europe, but the Lesser Asia, Iberia, Albania, part of Armenia, Media, and the vast regions in the northern parts of Asia, and probably America, were peopled by his descendants. It is also foretold that he should "dwell in the tents of Shem;" which was accomplished both by his posterity's possessing part of the countries in which the Shemites inhabited, and especially by their being admitted to a participation of the same spiritual privileges, and received into the true church. So that this may be regarded as an illustrious prophecy of the conversion of the Gentiles, many ages before it happened. As to that part of Noah's prophecy which relateth to Canaan, this hath also received a remarkable completion. Noah was enabled to foretell the curse and punishment which a long time after befell the Canaanites, for their execrable wickedness and impurity. For that the true and proper ground of the punishment which was inflicted upon them was their own wickedness, is evident from many express declarations of Scripture, particularly Levit. xviii. 24, 25. 27, 28. Deut. ix. 5. This wickedness of theirs God perfectly foresaw, and determined, on the account of it, to inflict exemplary punishment upon them; though he would not suffer the threatened punishment and curse to take place, till their "iniquities were full," i. e. till they were arrived at the height. And when this was the case, it tended to render the punishment more remarkable, that it had been foretold so long before. And it was wisely ordered, that this prophecy should be recorded by Moses, that, when it came

to be visibly accomplished in Canaan's posterity, the hand of Providence in it might be more distinctly observed. It is far therefore from being true, that Noah pronounced this in a *passion or drunken fit*, as his Lordship seems willing to represent it. It was not properly an imprecation, but a prophecy, and it might be fitly rendered, "Cursed shall Canaan be." It was a prediction of what should befall Ham's descendants by Canaan, who resembled Ham, their ancestor, in wickedness and impurity.

Lord Bolingbroke hath several little cavils, which are designed to invalidate the credit of this prophecy. One is, that Canaan was a servant of servants, not to his *brethren*, as is foretold, ver. 25, but to his *uncles*, viz. *Shem* and *Japheth*. But this objection seems to betray an utter ignorance of the Hebrew idiom, according to which the word *brethren* is of a large extent, and taketh in not only brothers strictly so called, but even distant relations, of which many instances might be given. And it must be farther considered, that the prophecy was not properly designed to signify, that Canaan, in person, should be servant of servants to his uncles Shem and Japheth, but that his posterity should be servants to theirs, who might, by reason of the original relation between them, be called their *brethren*.

It is farther urged, that Canaan became a *servant of servants* unto Shem indeed, but not to Japheth, though this is foretold, ver. 27. But this cavil is no better founded than the former. For the Canaanites became servants to the posterity of Japheth as well as of Shem. The most powerful and famous of Canaan's descendants, the Tyrians and Carthaginians, after having made a great figure in the world, were destroyed, or reduced to the most miserable servitude; the former by the Greeks under Alexander the Great, the latter by the Romans, both of whom descended from Japheth.

Another objection, which he insinuates, is, that Shem's posterity were *servants of servants for above fourscore years* to the Egyptians, who were the descendants of Mizraim, another of Ham's sons. But there is no pretence for urging this as a breach of the prediction, since no express mention is made there of any of Ham's sons, but Canaan, concerning whom it is foretold, that he should be a servant of servants unto Shem and Japheth, which was remarkably fulfilled. Or, if we suppose, as many great divines have done, that the curse was designed to extend to others of Ham's posterity, as well as the Canaanites, though not particularly mentioned in this short account, because Moses' design led him only to take express notice of that part of the curse which related to the Canaanites, who were more than ordinarily corrupt, and upon whom the curse took place in the fullest manner; even on this view of it, the prophecy may be fully justified. Ham's descendants have had a brand upon them, and been generally among the most abject and wretched of the human race. It is true, that the Israelites, who were a branch of Shem's posterity, were for a time held in the bitterest bondage by the Egyptians, who proceeded from Ham.

This was permitted for very valuable ends, and ended in a glorious deliverance of the former from the tyranny and oppression of the latter. To which it may be added, that notwithstanding the Egyptians were for a long time a flourishing people, and had great power and dominion, yet they also became remarkably subjected to the posterity of Shem and Japheth, and so have continued for a great number of ages. They have been subjected successively to the Persians, Grecians, Romans, Saracens, Mamalukes, Turks, so as to verify that remarkable prophecy of Ezekiel, that Egypt should be *the basest of kingdoms*, neither should it *exalt itself any more among the nations*, Ezek. xxix. 15.

Thus it appears, that this boasted objection, upon which so mighty a stress has been laid, as if it were alone sufficient to overthrow the authority of Holy Writ, turneth out rather to the confirmation of it.

SECTION II.

His Lordship's Attempt against the Gospel History, and the Divine Authority of the Christian Religion, considered.

HAVING examined what the late Lord Bolingbroke hath urged against the authority and credibility of the Scriptures of the Old Testament, let us next consider the attempt he makes against the authority of the New. He had indeed, whilst he expressed a great contempt of the Jewish scriptures, affected to speak with a favourable regard to Christianity. But he afterwards throws off the disguise, and makes it plainly appear, that he hath as little veneration and esteem for the one as for the other. It is no great sign of his respect for Christianity, that at the same time that he does all he can to destroy the credit of the Jewish history, and to show that it is not at all to be depended upon, he declares—"that the foundation of the Christian system is laid partly in those histories, and in the prophecies joined to them, or inserted in them."* But, not content with this general insinuation, he afterwards proceedeth, in his fifth Letter, to a more direct attack upon the Christian revelation.† He insisteth upon it, that the facts, upon which the authority of the Christian religion is founded, have not been proved as all historical facts, to which credit should be given, ought to be proved. He declares to the noble Lord to whom he writes, "that this is a matter of great moment; and that therefore he makes no excuse for the zeal which obliges him to dwell a little on it."‡ And after having endeavoured to show, that "there remains at this time no standard at all of Christianity," either in the text of Scripture,

* Works, vol. i. p. 91, 92.

† Ibid. p. 174—185.

‡ Ibid. p. 176.

or in tradition, he argues, that "by consequence, either this religion was not originally of divine institution, or else God has not provided effectually for preserving the genuine purity of it, and the gates of hell have actually prevailed, in contradiction to his promise, against the Church." He must be worse than an atheist that affirms the last; and therefore the best effect of this reasoning that can be hoped for, is, that men should fall into theism, and subscribe to the first. And accordingly he roundly declares, that "Christianity may lean on the civil and ecclesiastical power, and be supported by the forcible influence of education: but the proper force of religion, that force which subdues the mind, and awes the conscience by conviction, will be wanting."* He adds, "Since I have said so much on the subject, in my zeal for Christianity, I will add this further.—The resurrection of letters was a fatal period: the Christian system has been attacked, and wounded too, very severely since that time."† And again, speaking of those of the clergy who act for spiritual, not temporal ends, and are desirous that men should believe and practise the doctrines of Christianity, he saith, that "they will feel and own the weight of the considerations he offers; and will agree, that however the people have been, or may be, amused, yet Christianity has been in decay ever since the resurrection of letters."‡ This is an odd proof of his pretended *zeal for Christianity*, to insinuate, that all good and honest divines will agree with him, that Christianity has been losing ground ever since the revival of learning and knowledge; as if it could not bear the light, and only subsisted by darkness and ignorance. It will help farther to show his design in this, if we compare it with what he saith in his sixth Letter; § where he mentions the resurrection of letters, after the art of printing had been invented, as one of the principal causes that contributed to the diminution of the papal authority and usurpations. And he observes, that "as soon as the means of acquiring and spreading information grew common, it is no wonder that a system was unravelled, which could not have been woven with success in any age, but those of gross ignorance, and credulous superstition." We may see by this what a compliment he designs to Christianity, when he represents it as having received a fatal blow at the resurrection of letters, and as having been in decay ever since. He plainly puts it on a level with the papal authority and usurpation, and supposes the same of Christianity that he does of popery, that it was a system which could only have been woven in the ages of ignorance and superstition, which owed its reception and prevalency to times of darkness, and has been decaying ever since the means of acquiring and spreading information grew common.

This may suffice to show the respect that the writer of these Letters bears to Christianity. Before I enter on a distinct examination of what he hath offered, I would observe, that he endeavour-

* Works, vol. i. p. 180, 181, 182.

† Ibid. p. 182.

‡ Ibid. p. 185.

§ Ibid. p. 206, 207.

eth to prepare his way by declaiming, for several pages together, against the priests, divines, and ecclesiastical historians, on the account of that spirit of lying that hath prevailed among them in all ages.* But he himself well observes and proves, in opposition to an historical Pyrrhonism, that though there have been abundance of lies and false history put upon the world, this ought not to diminish the credit of the true. And therefore the frauds and falsehoods of many that have professed a zeal for Christianity, ought to be no prejudice against the authority of the New Testament, or the credibility of the facts on which it is supported, provided it can be shown, that these facts come to us with a sufficient degree of evidence to make it reasonable for us to receive them as true.

If, as he asserts, "numberless fables have been invented to support Judaism and Christianity; and for this purpose false history as well as false miracles have been employed;"—it is certain, that no persons have taken greater pains, or been more successful in their attempts to detect and expose such frauds and false history, than Christian divines and critics; many of whom have exercised themselves this way with great judgment and impartiality, as being sensible that Christianity needeth no such supports, and that such frauds dishonour the cause they are intended to serve. If we examine the New Testament, we shall find no encouragement there given to such methods. A remarkable simplicity, and impartial regard to truth, every-where appear. And to lie for the glory of God, or to *do evil that good may come of it*, is there most expressly condemned. It was when men began to fall from the true original spirit of Christianity, and not content with the simplicity of religion as Christ and his apostles left it, attempted to bring in innovations, additions, alterations in the Christian doctrine and worship; it was then that fraud and imposture, or a foolish credulity, began to prevail, and grew more and more, the farther they removed from the first and purest ages. And it is capable of a clear proof, that it was principally in favour of those corrupt additions and abuses of Christianity, that false history and false miracles have been artfully contrived, and zealously propagated. And why should it be turned to the disadvantage of the gospel-history or miracles, that history has been corrupted and falsified, in favour of doctrines or practices, *e. g.* the *invocation of saints, purgatory, the worship of images, relics, &c.*, which Christianity has not countenanced or authorized? To which it may be added, that it is plainly foretold in the New Testament, that there should be a great apostacy from the purity of religion, and that the corruption should be introduced, and carried on, by *signs and lying wonders*. And if this hath actually been the case, instead of furnishing a proper objection against true original Christianity, it affordeth a manifest proof of the perfect foreknowledge of its divine authority.

He seems to lay a great stress upon it, that "the church has had this advantage over her adversaries—that the works of those who have

* Works, vol. i. p. 123, et seq.

written against her have been destroyed; and whatever she advanceth to justify herself, and to defame her adversaries, is preserved in her annals and the writings of her doctors."*—And he takes particular notice "of Gregory the Great's proclaiming war to all heathen learning, in order to promote Christian verity."† But it is certain, that the humour of destroying the heathen writings never generally obtained in the Christian church. On the contrary, it was principally owing to Christians that so many of those writings have been transmitted to us. The Mahometans, and some of the barbarous nations, destroyed *libraries*, and monuments of learning, wherever they came. But it is a matter of fact not to be contested, that great numbers of heathen writings and monuments have been preserved; by Christians they have been preserved; and from thence the learned have been able to give an ample account of their *religion, rites, laws, and history*. And this is so far from being a disadvantage to Christianity, that great use hath been made of the heathen learning to serve and promote the Christian cause. The emperor Julian was so sensible of this, that he formed a design of modelling the schools, so that the Christians should not be acquainted with the heathen writers. As to the books that have been written against Christianity,‡ it is possible that the ill-judged zeal of some Christians may have occasioned the loss of some of them: but I am apt to think it was owing in most instances to the same causes and accidents, to which we may attribute the loss of so many ancient monuments and admired writings, not only of the heathens, but of eminent fathers, and ancient writers of the Christian church. Many celebrated apologies for Christianity, and books in defence of religion, have been lost; when, on the contrary, the works even of Lucretius, a system of Epicurism, the life of Apollonius Tyaneus, and others of the like sort, have come down to our times.

These insinuations do not properly come up to the main point. But in his fifth letter, under pretence of giving advice to divines, and showing that it is incumbent upon them to apply themselves to the study of history, he sets himself more directly to attack the authority of the Christian religion, and to subvert, as far as in him lieth, the foundations on which the proof of its divine original depends. And the course of his reasoning is plainly this: that Christianity is wholly founded upon facts, and that those facts do not come to us with a sufficient degree of evidence to be relied on: they have not been proved as matters of fact ought to be proved. He declares, that—"it has been long matter of astonishment to him,

* Works, vol. i. p. 127, 128.

† Ibid. p. 131.

‡ The heathen writers against Christianity seem not to have been much esteemed among the Pagans themselves; and this may be one reason why they were not very carefully preserved. There is a remarkable passage of Chrysostom to this purpose, who, in a discourse addressed to the heathens, observes, That the philosophers, and famous rhetoricians, who were against Christianity, had only rendered themselves ridiculous: that they had not been able to persuade any one among so many people, either wise or simple, man or woman; that the books written by them were had in such contempt, that they disappeared almost as soon as they were published: and that if any of them were preserved, it was among Christians that one might find them. Chrys. tom. ii. p. 559. *Edit. Bened.*

that Christian divines, those of them that can be called so without a sneer, could take so much silly pains to establish mystery on metaphysics, revelation on philosophy, and matters of fact on abstract reasoning. A religion founded on the authority of a divine mission, confirmed by prophecies and miracles, appeals to facts: and the facts must be proved, as all other facts that pass for authentic, are proved. If they are thus proved, the religion will prevail without the assistance of so much profound reasoning; if they are not thus proved, the authority of it will sink in the world, even with this assistance."*—He therefore blames the divines for using improper proofs in their disputes with deists. He asks—"What do they mean to din improper proofs in ears that are open to proper proofs?" Thus it is that he characterises the deists; and afterwards describes them as persons—"of minds candid, but not implicit; willing to be informed, but curious to examine."† But how different is the account he giveth even of the most learned Christians! He affirms, that "they have not been hitherto impartial enough, to take an accurate examination of the Jewish and Christian system, or have not been honest enough to communicate it."‡ —This is a very severe and confident censure. There have been many persons, not only among divines, but among the laity, of distinguished eminence for probity and virtue, as well as for learning and judgment, and who, to speak modestly, were in these respects no way inferior to the late Lord Bolingbroke, that have professed to examine with all the attention they were capable of, and with an earnest desire of knowing the truth, the evidences of the Jewish and Christian system: but because, as the result of their inquiries, they were confirmed in the belief of the divine original of the Jewish and Christian revelation, therefore in his judgment, not one of them was honest or sagacious enough to make an accurate examination: and I apprehend they have no other way of obtaining the character of sagacity or impartiality from writers of this cast, but by renouncing Christianity. If they do this, they shall be allowed to be sagacious and impartial inquirers; but otherwise, they must be content to have their judgment or honesty called in question. But if we may judge by the writings of the deists that have hitherto appeared, not excepting those of his Lordship, they have not given very favourable indications, either of an uncommon sagacity, or of a candid and impartial inquiry.

He tells the noble Lord to whom he writes,—“You will find reason perhaps to think as I do, that it is high time the clergy in all Christian communions should join their forces, and establish those historical questions, which are the foundations of the whole system, on clear and unquestionable historical authority, such as they require in all cases of moment from others, and reject candidly what cannot be thus established.”§

Christian divines have frequently done what his Lordship blames them for not doing. The facts on which the Christian system is

* Works, vol. i. p. 175.

† Ibid. p. 179.

‡ Ibid. p. 181.

§ Ibid. p. 183.

founded, relate principally to what is recorded in the writings of the New Testament, concerning the *holy life*, and excellent *character*, of our blessed Saviour, his admirable *discourses*, the many illustrious *miracles* he performed during the course of his personal ministry in proof of his divine mission, his *resurrection* from the dead, and consequent *exaltation*, the extraordinary *effusion of the Holy Ghost* upon his disciples, and the miraculous attestations that were given to his apostles, and the first publishers of the Christian revelation. The question is, what reason have we to think that those facts were really done? His Lordship requires, that these facts should be proved, as all other facts that pass for authentic are proved: and that divines should establish the credit of those facts on clear and unquestionable historical authority, such as they require in all cases of moment from others. The Christian divines are willing to join issue on this point. The best, the properest way of proving the truth of ancient facts is undoubtedly by authentic accounts published in the age in which the facts were done, and transmitted with sufficient marks of credibility to our own times. And several things are to be considered, in order to our judging whether, and how far, those accounts may be depended on.—If the facts there related were of a public nature, done for the most part in *open view*, and for which an appeal is made to numbers of witnesses:—if the accounts of those facts were given by persons that were perfectly well acquainted with the facts, and who, having had full opportunity to know them, were themselves absolutely persuaded of the truth and reality of those facts; if they appear from their whole character to have been persons of great probity, and undesigning simplicity, and who could have no worldly interest to serve by feigning or disguising those facts; and if their prejudices had not any tendency to bias them in favour of those facts, but the contrary: if the writings themselves have all the characters of genuine simplicity, and an impartial regard to truth, that can be reasonably desired: and if they can be clearly traced from the age in which they were written, and the facts were said to be done, through the succeeding ages, to our own times: and finally, if it is undeniably evident, that there were surprizing effects produced in the very age in which the facts were said to be done, and which cannot otherwise be accounted for, than by allowing the truth of those facts, and the effects of which continue to this day: where these several circumstances concur, they lay a just foundation for receiving the accounts given of facts as true. According to the justest rules of criticism, such accounts of facts may be depended on: and many facts are generally received and believed, that fall greatly short of this evidence.

Now it is capable of being proved, and has been often proved with great clearness and strength, that all these circumstances concur in relation to the important facts on which the Christian system is founded. The facts themselves were, for the most part, done in open view, and of which there were many witnesses. Christ's whole personal ministry was a very public thing. The scene of it was not laid in a dark obscure corner, nor was it carried on merely

that Christian divines, those of them that can be called so without a sneer, could take so much silly pains to establish mystery on metaphysics, revelation on philosophy, and matters of fact on abstract reasoning. A religion founded on the authority of a divine mission, confirmed by prophecies and miracles, appeals to facts: and the facts must be proved, as all other facts that pass for authentic, are proved. If they are thus proved, the religion will prevail without the assistance of so much profound reasoning; if they are not thus proved, the authority of it will sink in the world, even with this assistance."*—He therefore blames the divines for using improper proofs in their disputes with deists. He asks—"What do they mean to din improper proofs in ears that are open to proper proofs?" Thus it is that he characterises the deists; and afterwards describes them as persons—"of minds candid, but not implicit; willing to be informed, but curious to examine."† But how different is the account he giveth even of the most learned Christians! He affirms, that "they have not been hitherto impartial enough, to take an accurate examination of the Jewish and Christian system, or have not been honest enough to communicate it."‡—This is a very severe and confident censure. There have been many persons, not only among divines, but among the laity, of distinguished eminence for probity and virtue, as well as for learning and judgment, and who, to speak modestly, were in these respects no way inferior to the late Lord Bolingbroke, that have professed to examine with all the attention they were capable of, and with an earnest desire of knowing the truth, the evidences of the Jewish and Christian system: but because, as the result of their inquiries, they were confirmed in the belief of the divine original of the Jewish and Christian revelation, therefore in his judgment, not one of them was honest or sagacious enough to make an accurate examination: and I apprehend they have no other way of obtaining the character of sagacity or impartiality from writers of this cast, but by renouncing Christianity. If they do this, they shall be allowed to be sagacious and impartial inquirers; but otherwise, they must be content to have their judgment or honesty called in question. But if we may judge by the writings of the deists that have hitherto appeared, not excepting those of his Lordship, they have not given very favourable indications, either of an uncommon sagacity, or of a candid and impartial inquiry.

He tells the noble Lord to whom he writes,—“You will find reason perhaps to think as I do, that it is high time the clergy in all Christian communions should join their forces, and establish those historical facts, which are the foundations of the whole system, on clear and unquestionable historical authority, such as they require in all cases of moment from others, and reject candidly what cannot be thus established.”§

Christian divines have frequently done what his Lordship blames them for not doing. The facts on which the Christian system is

* Works, vol. i. p. 175.

† Ibid. p. 179.

‡ Ibid. p. 181.

§ Ibid. p. 183.

the authors of them. And it is observable, that they do not represent him, as one might be apt to expect they would have done, as triumphing over those sufferings with an exulting bravery, but rather as manifesting great tenderness of heart and sensibility under them, though mixed with remarkable constancy and resignation.

It is a farther proof of that impartial regard to truth, which is observable in the writers of those accounts, that, though some of them were apostles themselves, and others their special friends and intimates, yet they relate, without disguise, things which seem to bear hard upon their characters. They relate not only the lowness and meanness of their condition and circumstances, but their ignorance, their dulness of apprehension, the weakness of their faith, the power of their prejudices, their vain ambition, and contentions among themselves who should be the greatest, the reproofs they received from their Lord, their cowardly forsaking him in his last sufferings, and particularly the shameful fall of Peter, one of the chief of them, and his denial of his Lord and master, with the aggravating circumstances that attended it. They have not attempted to conceal any of these things, which they might easily have done, or to excuse or disguise them; than which nothing could better show their impartiality, and love of truth.

It farther strengthens the credit of their relations, when it is considered, that they had no temptation to disguise or falsify the great facts recorded in the gospels, in order to serve any worldly interest, or to humour and confirm any darling prejudices. On the contrary, it appeareth, that they were themselves brought, by the irresistible evidence of the facts they relate, to embrace a religion, which was not only contrary to their worldly interests, and exposed them to all manner of reproaches, persecutions, and sufferings, but which was also contrary to their former most favourite notions, and rooted prejudices. For what could be more contrary to the notions and prejudices, which then universally possessed the minds of the Jews, both of the learned and of the vulgar, than the doctrine of a crucified Messiah, who was to erect a kingdom, not of this world, but of a spiritual nature, in the benefits and privileges of which the Gentiles were to be joint sharers with the Jews? And, finally, they gave the highest proof of their being themselves persuaded of the truth of those facts, by their persisting in their testimony with an unshaken constancy, in opposition to all the powers and terrors of this world. To this it may be added, that the writings themselves have all the characters of genuine purity, simplicity, and uncorrupted integrity, that any writings can have; nor is there any thing in them that gives the least ground of suspicion of their having been written in any later age, or that savours of the spirit of this world, of ambition, avarice, or sensuality. And these writings have been transmitted to us with an unquestionable evidence, greater than can be produced for any other writings in the world. We can clearly trace them through all the intermediate ages up to that immediately succeeding the apostles, and have the most convincing proof of their having been still extant, and still received and acknowledged among

Christians. There are great numbers of books, now in our hands, that were written and published in the several ages between that time and this, in which there are continual references to the gospels, and other sacred books of the New Testament. And by the numerous quotations from them, and large portions transcribed out of them in every age, it is incontestably manifest, that the accounts of the facts, discourses, doctrines, &c. which now appear in them, are the same that were to be found in them in the first ages. Innumerable copies of them were soon spread abroad in different nations: they have been translated into various languages: many commentaries have been written upon them by different authors, who have inserted the sacred text in their writings: they have been constantly applied to on many occasions, by persons of different sects, parties, inclinations, and interests. These are things which no man can be so hardy as to deny. And by this kind of evidence, the greatest and the most convincing which the nature of the thing can possibly admit of, we are assured, that the evangelical records, which are now in our hands, have been transmitted safe to us, and are the same that were originally published in the apostolical age; and that a general corruption of them, or a substitution of other accounts instead of them, if any had attempted it, would have been an impossible thing.

Taking all these considerations together, it appeareth, that never were there any accounts of facts that better deserved to be depended on. And what mightily confirmeth the credit of those writings, and of the facts there related, is, that it cannot be contested, that great numbers, both of Jews and heathens, upon the credit of those facts, forsaking the religion of their ancestors, were brought to receive the religion of Jesus in the first age, when they had the best opportunity of inquiring into the truth and certainty of those facts; and this in opposition to their most inveterate prejudices, and when, by embracing it, they exposed themselves to all manner of evils and sufferings. The spreading of the Christian religion, as the case was circumstanced, furnisheth a very strong proof of the truth of the facts on which it was founded, and cannot otherwise be accounted for.

Our author asserts, that "if the facts can be proved, the Christian religion will prevail, without the assistance of profound reasoning; but, if the facts cannot be proved, the authority of it will sink in the world, even with this assistance."* I think it may be fairly argued from this, that if the extraordinary facts had not been true, on the evidence of which alone Christianity is founded, it must have sunk at the very beginning, and could never have been established in the world at all; considering the nature of this religion, and the difficulties and oppositions it had to encounter with. It was manifestly contrary to the prevailing prejudices both of Jews and Gentiles: it tended entirely to subvert the whole system of the pagan superstition and idolatry, which was wrought into their civil consti-

* Works, vol. i. p. 75.

tution, and upon which the prosperity of the Roman empire, and the establishment of their state, were thought to depend. It also tended to set aside the peculiar polity of the Jews, upon which they so highly valued themselves, and to subvert all the pleasing hopes and expectations of the temporal kingdom of the Messiah, with which they were so infinitely delighted. It obliged them to receive one that had been ignominiously condemned and crucified, as their Redeemer and their Lord, the Son of God, and Saviour of the world. It proposed no temporal advantages to its votaries, to bribe men to embrace it; gave no indulgence to their corrupt lusts, nor had any thing in it to sooth and gratify their vicious appetites and inclinations. At the same time it had all the powers of the world engaged against it; yet it soon triumphed over all opposition, though propagated by the seemingly meanest instruments; and made an astonishing progress through a great part of the Roman empire, then the most knowing and civilized part of the earth. This is a strong additional confirmation of the truth of those accounts which are contained in the gospel records; since there could not be, as the case was circumstanced, any possible inducement to Jews or Gentiles to embrace Christianity, but a thorough conviction of its divine original, and of the truth of those extraordinary facts by which it was attested.

And if the first propagators of this religion had offered no other proof but their own words in support of it, and in confirmation of the divine authority of a crucified Jesus, it cannot, with any consistency, be supposed, that a scheme of religion, so destitute of all worldly advantages, and so opposite to men's prejudices, as well as vices, and which subjected those that made profession of it to such bitter reproaches and persecutions, could possibly have prevailed in the world.

If, at the time when Christianity made its first appearance in the world, it had been embraced by the Roman emperor, as it afterwards was by Constantine the Great, if it had been countenanced by the higher powers, there might have been some pretence for ascribing the progress it made to the encouragement it met with from the great and powerful. The author of these Letters, speaking of the miracles said to be wrought at the tomb of the Abbé Paris, observes, "That, if the first minister had been a Jansenist, all France had kept his festival; and those silly impostures would have been transmitted, in all the solemn pomp of history, from the knaves of his age to the fools of the next."* But this very instance, in which the deists have triumphed so much, may be turned against them, since it affordeth a plain proof, how difficult it is to maintain the credit of miraculous facts, when they are discountenanced by the civil power. The miracles supposed to be wrought at the tomb of the Abbé Paris were quashed, and a stop put to the course of the miraculous operations, and the falsehood of some of them plainly detected, notwithstanding there was a numerous, a powerful, and

* Works, vol. i. p. 125, 126.

artful body of men engaged, in reputation and interest, to support the credit of them. It may therefore be justly concluded, that if the extraordinary facts, on which Christianity was founded, had been false, the credit of them must soon have sunk, and that religion with it, when all the reigning powers of the world, Jewish and heathen, joined their forces and influence to suppress it.*

In what hath been said above, to show the credit that is due to the accounts given of the facts by which Christianity is established, it is supposed, that these accounts were written by Christ's own disciples, or their most intimate companions, and in the first age, the age in which the facts were done, *i. e.* by persons perfectly well acquainted with those facts. But this is what our author seems unwilling to allow. In his fifth Letter, after having observed, that—"false history has been employed to propagate Christianity formerly, and that the same abuse of history is still continued"—he instances in Mr. Abbadie's saying, that—"the gospel of St. Matthew is cited by Clemens, bishop of Rome, a disciple of the Apostles; that Barnabas cites it in his Epistle; that Ignatius and Polycarp receive it; and that the same fathers give testimony for St. Mark." He adds, that "the bishop of London, in his third Pastoral Letter, speaks to the same effect." And then he proceeds—"I presume the fact advanced by the minister and the bishop, is a mistake. If the fathers of the first century do mention some passages that are agreeable to what we read in our Evangelists, will it follow, that these fathers had the same gospels before them? To say so, is a manifest abuse of history, and quite inexcusable in writers that knew, or might have known, that these fathers made use of other gospels, wherein such passages might be contained, or they might be preserved in unwritten tradition. Besides which, I would almost venture to affirm, that the fathers of the first century do not expressly name the gospels we have of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John."† His design is plainly to signify, that there is no proof, that the Gospels, the books of the Evangelists which we now have in our hands, were written in the first age of Christianity.

As this is a matter of importance, I shall offer some observations upon it.

And, first, it is to be observed, that though but few of the writings of the fathers of the first century are come down to us, and those generally very short; yet it cannot be denied, that in all these writings the facts recorded in the gospels, especially relating to our Lord's passion and resurrection, and the scheme of religion there taught, are all along supposed, and referred to, as of undoubted truth and certainty, and of divine original: so that those writings of the apostolical fathers bear testimony materially to the gospels, and to the facts there related, and come in aid of those accounts. It is

* The difficulties Christianity had to encounter with, are elegantly represented by Mr. West, in his admirable Treatise on the Resurrection.

† Works, vol. i. p. 177, 178.

also manifest, that there are several particular passages quoted in these writings, which seem plainly to refer to passages that are now found in the Evangelists; and these passages are mentioned in a manner which shows, that they regarded them as of divine authority. Nor is it a valid objection against this, that they do not cite the gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, by name: for it is not their custom, in mentioning passages of Scripture, to name the particular books out of which these passages are extracted; they content themselves with producing the passages, or giving the sense of them. This they generally do with regard to testimonies produced from the sacred books of the Old Testament; and yet no one will deny, that they had those books in their hands, and acknowledged their divine authority.

Barnabas, in his Epistle, has some plain references to passages that are to be found in St. Matthew's gospel; and with regard to one of them, he introduced it with saying, *It is written*; which was a form of quotation usual among the Jews in citing their sacred books, and seems plainly to show, that he referred to written accounts of the actions and discourses of our Saviour.

Clement, in his Epistle, mentions several remarkable passages in our Lord's discourses, recorded by the Evangelists, Matthew, Mark, and Luke; he calls them, *the words of the Lord Jesus, which he spake*, and represents them as of the highest authority, and deserving the greatest regard.

Ignatius hath several passages, which either are plain references, or manifest allusions, to passages that are to be found in St. Matthew's gospel, and to several other books of the New Testament. He tells those to whom he writes, that they "ought to hearken to the Prophets, but especially to the gospel, in which the passion has been manifested to us, and the resurrection perfected."* Where, as by the Prophets are undoubtedly to be understood the prophetic writings, so by *the Gospel* seems plainly to be understood the writings of the Evangelists, collected into one book called the Gospel. And in other passages he speaks to the same purpose,† and in a manner which shows, that this book of the gospel was of the most sacred authority among Christians.

Polycarp, in his Epistle, though very short, hath many passages that plainly refer or allude to texts of the New Testament; and quoting some passages which are expressly found in the Evangelists, he introduces them thus, *The Lord hath said*. He expresses his confidence, that the Philippians, to whom he writes, were *well exercised in the Holy Scriptures*. And it is manifest from what he there adds, that by the Holy Scriptures he particularly intends the sacred writings of the New Testament: which shows, that they were had in the greatest veneration by the Christians of that age.

He that would see a more distinct account of these things, may consult the learned Dr. Lardner's accurate collection of the passages

* Ep. ad Smyrn. s. 7.

† Ep. ad Philadelph. s. 5, et 9.

from the apostolical fathers, in his *Credibility of the Gospel History*, part ii. vol. i.

It appeareth from this brief account, that the apostolical fathers have taken as much notice of the evangelical writings, as could be reasonably expected, or as they had occasion to do. And therefore I see not why Mr. Abbadie should be charged with an abuse of history, for representing the fathers of the first century as having cited the books of the Evangelists; since though they do not expressly quote them by name, yet they quote passages as of sacred authority, which are to be found in these books; and therefore it may be reasonably supposed, that they refer to those books, which, as I shall presently show, were then extant, and the authority of which was then acknowledged.

But it is urged, that if the fathers of the first century do mention some passages that are agreeable to what we read in our Evangelists, it does not follow, that they had the same gospels before them; because "those fathers made use of other gospels, wherein such passages might be contained, or they might be preserved in unwritten tradition." But this way of stating the case does not afford the least presumption, that the books of our Evangelists were not then extant. It is only supposed, that there might be other accounts in that age, in which the same things might be contained; and that the actions and discourses of our Lord were well known among the Christians of the first age, both by written accounts, and by tradition received from the preaching of the Apostles. And this certainly confirmeth, instead of invalidating, the accounts given in the gospels, and supposeth the facts there recorded to have been of well-known credit and authority. But he ought not to mention it as a thing that is and must be acknowledged by all the learned, that those fathers of the first century made use of other gospels besides those of the Evangelists. It cannot be proved, that they ever refer to any other gospels. The only passage in all the apostolical fathers, which seems to look that way, is one in Ignatius, which some suppose was taken out of the gospel of the Hebrews, which itself was really St. Matthew's gospel, with some interpolations and additions; and yet that passage may be fairly interpreted, as referring to the words of our Saviour, recorded by St. Luke, chap. xxiv. 39.*

It may be gathered indeed from the introduction of St. Luke's gospel, that many in that first age had undertaken to write an account of the history of our Saviour's life, miracles, discourses, &c., but it does not appear, that those writings were generally received among Christians as authentic; probably because they were not done with sufficient exactness, and had a mixture of things false or uncertain. And therefore it is not likely, that the passages referred to by the fathers of the first century, were taken from those writings: it is far more probable, that they were taken from the books of the Evangelists, where we still find them, and which were then extant, and their authority acknowledged among Christians.

* See Lardner's *Credibility*, &c. part ii. vol. i. p. 184, 185, 186.

That the gospels which we have now in our hands were undoubtedly extant in the apostolical age, and regarded as authentic, admitteth of a clear proof, if it be considered, that in the age immediately succeeding we find them universally received and acknowledged in the Christian church. There are several books come down to our times, which were written by authors who unquestionably lived in the second century, in which these gospels are frequently and by name referred to as of divine authority, and many express quotations drawn from them; by which it is manifest, that they were then received with great veneration in the Christian churches. And it appeareth from the first Apology of Justin Martyr, published about an hundred years after the death of our Saviour, that it was then the ordinary practice to read the *memoirs of the Apostles*, and the *writings of the Prophets*, in the religious assemblies of Christians. And that by the *memoirs of the Apostles* he means the books of the Evangelists, is evident from several passages in his writings; and particularly from a passage in this very Apology, where, having mentioned the *memoirs composed by the Apostles*, he adds, *which are called Gospels*; and there are frequent citations from all of them in his writings; which plainly show, that he looked upon those books as authentic histories of Jesus Christ. The same may be observed concerning other writers in that century. And since it is manifest, that the four gospels were generally received, and had in the highest esteem and veneration, among Christians in the second century, even in the former part of it (for that Apology was written about the year 139 or 140), this plainly sheweth, that the gospels must have been written and published in the apostolical age itself. And it was, because they were known to have been written by the Apostles, or their companions and intimates; and that the accounts there given were authentic, and absolutely to be depended upon; that these writings were so early and generally received. Eusebius, speaking of Quadratus, and other eminent persons, who "held the first rank in the succession of the Apostles," informs us, "that they travelled abroad, performed the work of Evangelists, being ambitious to preach Christ, and deliver the Scripture of the divine Gospels."* The persons he speaketh of flourished in the reign of Trajan, in the beginning of the second century, and had undoubtedly lived a good part of their time in the first; and their carrying the books of the gospels with them where they preached, and delivering them to their converts, sheweth that those gospels were then well known to be genuine, and had in great esteem. And indeed if they had not been written in the apostolical age, and then known to be genuine, it cannot be conceived, that so soon after, even in the next age, they could have been so generally dispersed, and statedly read in the Christian assemblies, and regarded as of equal authority with the writings of the ancient prophets, which had been for some ages read in the synagogues on the Sabbath-days. And though a great clamour hath been raised concerning some spurious gospels which

* Euseb. Eccles. Hist. lib. iii. cap. 37.

appeared in the primitive times, there is nothing capable of a clearer proof, than that the four gospels, and those only, were generally received as of divine authority in the Christian church, in the ages nearest the apostles; and have continued so ever since, and have been all along regarded with the profoundest veneration.

To this ought to be added, that the heathen writers, who lived nearest those times, never pretended to deny, that the books of the Evangelists received among Christians were written by Christ's own disciples. Celsus lived in the second century. He speaks of Jesus, the author of the Christian religion, as having lived *πρὸ πάντων ὀλίγων ἐτῶν*, a very few years before. He mentions many things recorded in our Evangelists, relating to the birth, life, miracles, sufferings, and resurrection, of Jesus Christ; and tells the Christians — "These things we have produced out of your own writings." He all along supposeth them to have been written by Christ's own disciples, that lived and conversed with him, though he does all he can to ridicule and expose them.* To this it may be added, that the Emperor Julian, who flourished about the middle of the fourth century, and who was both of great acuteness, and very well disposed to take all advantages against Christianity, and had, no doubt, an opportunity of reading whatsoever books had been written against the Christians before his time, never pretends to contest the gospels being written by Christ's own disciples, and those whose names they bear, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John; whom he expressly mentions as the writers of those books;† though, no doubt, he would have been very well pleased, if he could have met with any proof or presumption that could make it probable, that the books of the Evangelists, so generally received among Christians, were written, not by Christ's own immediate disciples, or their companions, or in the apostolical age, but were compiled afterwards, and falsely ascribed to the Apostles. To which it may be added, that none of the Jews, in any of their writings against Christianity, though they often mention the books of the Evangelists, have ever pretended, that those books were not written by those to whom they are attributed, but by others, in after-times, under their names; nor do they ever mention any charge or suspicion of this kind, as having been brought against those books by their ancestors.

Thus we find, by the acknowledgment of friends and enemies, who lived nearest to those times, that the accounts contained in the books of the Evangelists were written in the apostolical age; the age in which those facts are said to have been done, which are there recorded. There are plain references to them, and passages produced out of them, in the few writings that remain of the first century. And in the age immediately succeeding, we have full proof, that they were universally received in the Christian church as of divine authority, and read as such in the Christian assemblies, and

* Orig. contra Celf. lib. ii. p. 67. 69, 70.

† Cyril Alex. contra Julian. lib. x. p. 327. Edit. Spanheim.

were ascribed to Christ's own immediate attendants, or their intimate companions, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, by name. This hath been universally admitted ever since in all ages: and these books have been transmitted down to our times with such an uninterrupted and continued evidence, as cannot be produced for any other books whatsoever. He would be accounted a very unreasonable man, that should deny, or even question it, whether the books of Livy, Sallust, Tacitus, were written by those whose names they bear. But the deists, and his Lordship among the rest, most unreasonably reject that historical testimony and evidence in behalf of the Scriptures, which they would account to be sufficient with regard to any other books in the world.

It gives a mighty force to all this, that, upon a careful examining and considering the books themselves, they bear the plain marks and characters of the first, the apostolical age, and not one mark of a later date. Though three of the Evangelists make particular mention of our Saviour's predictions concerning the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple, yet there is not any intimation given, in any one book of the New Testament, of that destruction as having been actually accomplished, which yet was in forty years after our Lord's crucifixion. And it could scarcely have been avoided, but that some or other of them must have taken notice of it, considering the many occasions there were for mentioning it, if these books had been generally written after that event. It appeareth, from the beginning of St. Luke's gospel, compared with the introduction to the Acts of the Apostles, that he wrote his gospel before he wrote the Acts. And yet this latter was evidently written in the apostolical age, and sometime before the death of St. Paul. For it is plain, from the accounts given in that book, that the writer of it was a companion of St. Paul in his labours and travels, and particularly was with him in his voyage to Rome; with an account of which, and of his preaching there two years in his own hired house, the book ends. It taketh no notice of his after labours and travels, and of his martyrdom at Rome; which it would undoubtedly have done, as well as of the martyrdom of St. James, if it had been written after those events happened. And it is a great proof of the high veneration the first Christians had for those writings, and how careful they were not to insert any accounts into them which were not originally there, that none of them ever pretended to make supplemental additions to that book, either with regard to St. Paul himself, or any other of the apostles. And as we may justly conclude, that St. Luke's gospel was published in the apostolical age itself, whilst many of the apostles were yet living, so it hath been generally agreed, that St. Matthew's gospel was published before that of St. Luke; and that the gospel of St. John was written last of all. And yet this last, as is manifest from the book itself, was written by one of Christ's own disciples, "the disciple whom Jesus loved." And it appeareth to have been principally designed to record several things, which were not distinctly taken notice of by the other evangelical writers. Accordingly we find, that though the facts are

there plainly supposed, which are related by the other Evangelists: yet those miracles and discourses of our Lord are chiefly insisted upon, which either were omitted by them, or but slightly mentioned. Indeed whosoever impartially considereth the writings of the New Testament, will easily observe in them many peculiar characters, which plainly point to the time in which they were written. And there is all the reason in the world to think, that if these books had been written in any succeeding age, they would have been in several respects different from what they now are. The Christian religion here appeareth in its primitive simplicity, without any of the mixtures of following ages. The idea that is given of the Christian church, in the writings of the New Testament, is such as is proper to the first age, and from which there were some variations, even in that which immediately followed. The discourses of our blessed Lord, as recorded by the Evangelists, are of such a nature, so full of divine wisdom, and admirable sentiments, as would manifestly appear, if there were room in this place to enter on a particular consideration of them: they are delivered with so much gravity and authority, and yet, for the most part, in such a particular way, that they carry the evident proofs of their own genuineness. The character given of our Saviour, in the books of the Evangelists, seems plainly to have been drawn from the life. And it may be justly affirmed, that it was not in the power of such writers, destitute, as they appear to be, of all art and ornament, to have feigned such a character: a character, in which is wonderfully united, a divine dignity becoming the Son of God, and an amiable humility and condescension becoming the Saviour of men; an admirable wisdom, in conjunction with the greatest candour and simplicity of heart; an ardent zeal for the glory of God, and the most extensive charity and benevolence towards mankind; an impartial freedom and severity in reproofing faults, and great tenderness in bearing with men's weaknesses and infirmities; an unparalleled purity and sanctity of manners, without any thing sour or unsociable, or a supercilious contempt of others; the most exemplary patience and fortitude under the greatest sufferings, joined with a remarkable tenderness and sensibility of spirit. To this may be added, the beauty of his maxims, the solidity of his reflections, the just and sublime notions of religion which he every-where inculcateth, far superior to any thing that was taught by the most celebrated doctors of the Jewish nation. The morals he is represented as having taught are the most pure and refined, and yet without running into any superstitious extremes, such as were the affected strictnesses of the Pharisees and Essenes, or the false refinements of some Christians in the following ages. The motives there proposed are the most powerful and efficacious that can be presented to the human mind, drawn from all the charms of the divine love and goodness; from the engaging offers of grace and mercy made to the truly penitent, which yet are so ordered as not to give the least encouragement to the obstinately wicked and disobedient; from the promises of divine aids to assist our sincere endeavours in the performance of

our duty; from the important solemnities of the future judgment, and the eternal retributions of the world to come; the inexpressible glory and felicity prepared for good men, and the dreadful punishments that shall be inflicted upon the wicked. In a word, so perfect is the idea of religion contained in those writings, that all attempts to add to it in succeeding ages, or raise it to an higher degree of perfection, have really fallen short of its original excellence, and tended to tarnish its primitive beauty and glory.

Taking all these considerations together, they form a very strong and convincing proof of the truth and authenticity of the gospel records; and that, whether we consider the method of conveyance, whereby they have been transmitted to us, and which we can trace up with a continued evidence to the first age, or the internal characters of original truth and purity, and genuine integrity, which appear in the writings themselves.

To take off the force of the evidence brought for the facts on which Christianity is established, it hath been urged, that these facts are only attested by Christians. The author of these Letters observes, that the church has this advantage over her adversaries, that the books that were written against her have been destroyed, whilst whatever tends to justify her has been preserved in her annals: and that "he must be very implicit indeed, who receives for true the history of any nation or religion, and much more that of any sect or party, without having the means of confronting it with some other history."* He here seems to suppose it as a thing certain, that there had been historical evidence against Christianity, but that the church had suppressed it.† But this is a precarious supposition, without any thing to support it. The account of the facts on which Christianity is founded, was published, as hath been shown, by persons who pretended to be perfectly well acquainted with those facts, and in the age in which they were done, and who speak of them as things publicly known, and of undoubted certainty. The proper way therefore for the enemies of Christianity to have taken, would have been, to have published, if they were able, contrary authentic accounts, in that very age, for disproving those facts; which it would have been easy to have done, if they had been false: for, in that case, thousands must have known them to be so; since many of the facts are represented as having been done in public view, and in the presence of great multitudes. But that no such contrary historical evidence was then produced or published, we may confidently affirm; not only because there is no account of any such evidence, but because if the facts on which Christianity is

* Works, vol. i. p. 128. 132.

† Lord Bolingbroke seems to have laid a great stress upon this thought, for he elsewhere observes, that "if time had brought to us all the proof for Christianity and against it, we should have been puzzled by contradictory proofs. See his Works, vol. iv. p. 270. where he presumes upon it as a thing certain, though he does not attempt to produce the least evidence for it, that there was formerly proof against Christianity, which, if it had come down to us, would have destroyed the evidence brought for it, or, at least, have very much weakened the force of that evidence, and kept the mind in suspense.

established had been authentically disproved, even in the age in which they were said to have been done; and if there had been good historical evidence produced on the other side, by which it appeared that those facts were false; the Christian religion, considering the other disadvantages that attended it, and that it was principally supported by those facts, must have sunk at once. How is it conceivable, that in that case it would have flourished more and more; and that vast numbers, and many of them persons of considerable sense and learning, would have continued to embrace it, in the face of the greatest difficulties and discouragements? How comes it, that none of the *Apologies for Christianity* that were published very early, and presented to the Roman emperors, some of which are still extant, take any notice of such contrary historical evidence, or endeavour to confute it, but still speak of those facts as incontestably true and certain? The first heathen author that appears to have written a formal book against the Christian religion, is Celsus: and what he advanced to this purpose, we learn from his own words, preserved by Origen, in his excellent answer to him. He endeavour-eth, as far as he can, to turn the gospel accounts to ridicule; but he never referreth to any authentic history, or book of credit and authority, which had been published, to show that the facts, recorded by the Évangelists, and believed by the Christians, were false. He pretended indeed, that "he could tell many other things, relating to Jesus, truer than those things that were written of him by his own disciples; but that he willingly passed them by:"* but we may be sure, that if he had been able to produce any contrary historical evidence, which he thought was of weight sufficient to invalidate the evangelical records, a man of his virulence and acuteness would not have failed to produce it; and his not having done so, plainly sheweth that he knew of none such; though, if there had been any such, he must have known it. Nor do I find that Julian, when he wrote against Christianity, pretended to produce any contrary historical evidence for disproving the facts recorded in the gospels: if he had, something of it would have appeared in Cyril's answer, in which there are many fragments of his book preserved. I think therefore the pretence of there having been contrary evidence to disprove the facts recorded in the gospel, which evidence was afterwards suppressed by the Christians, is absolutely vain and groundless. And to refuse our assent to the gospel history, for want of having an opportunity to confront it with contrary historical evidence, when we have no reason to think there ever was such evidence, would be the most unreasonable conduct in the world.

But still it is urged, that the accounts of those facts, in order to their obtaining full credit from any impartial person, ought to be confirmed by the testimony of those who were not themselves Christians; since Christians may be excepted against as prejudiced persons; and that, if there be no such testimony, it administers just ground of suspicion. As a great stress has been frequently laid upon this, I shall consider it distinctly.

* Orig. contra Cels. lib. ii. p. 67. Edit. Spencer.

To expect that professed enemies, who reviled and persecuted the Christians, should acknowledge the truth of the main facts on which Christianity is founded, is an absurdity and contradiction. And if any testimonies to this purpose were now to be found in their writings, it would undoubtedly be alleged by those gentlemen, who now complain of the want of such testimonies, that those passages were foisted in by Christians, and ought to be rejected as supposititious. But yet we have the testimony of adversaries concerning many facts relating to Christianity, as far as can be expected from adversaries. It cannot be expected, that Jews or heathens, continuing such, should acknowledge Christ's divine mission; that he was the Son of God, the Saviour of the world: but none of them ever pretended to deny, that there was such a person as Jesus Christ, who was the author of the Christian religion, and appeared in Judea in the reign of Tiberius. Tacitus's testimony, as well as that of Celsus, is very express to this purpose.* And some of the heathens went so far as to speak very honourably of him. So did the emperor Alexander Severus, who would have built a temple to him, if some of the pagans about him had not made strong remonstrances against it, as Lampridius informs us in his life.† And even Porphyry himself, whose words Eusebius hath preserved, speaks of him as a pious man, whose soul was taken into heaven.‡ It would be unreasonable to expect, that the enemies of Christianity should acknowledge the accounts given of Christ by the Evangelists to be true and authentic, and absolutely to be depended upon; for then they must have turned Christians. But yet they never denied, what some of our modern unbelievers seem unwilling to acknowledge, that Christ's own disciples, who had lived and conversed with him, had written accounts of his life, and actions, and discourses, which were received by Christians as true and authentic. The testimony of Celsus, as was observed before, is very full to the purpose. It cannot be expected, that Jews and heathens should acknowledge Christ's miracles to have been really wrought by a divine power. But they do not deny, that he did, or seemed to do, wonderful works. And the way they take to account for them amounteth to an acknowledgment of the facts. Some ascribed them to magical arts, as Celsus, who saith, that, on the account of the strange things he performed, Jesus claimed to be regarded as a God.§ Others, as Hierocles, opposed to them the wonders pretended to have been wrought by Apollonius Tyanæus. The Jews ascribed the works he performed to the virtue of the ineffable Name, which he stole out of the temple. And the emperor Julian expressly acknowledgeth some of his miraculous works, particularly his healing the lame and the blind, and casting out devils, at the same time that he affects to speak of them in a very slight and diminishing manner.|| As to Christ's having suffered under Pontius Pilate, the heathens and Jews were so far from denying it, that

* Tacit. *Annal.* lib. xv. † Cap. xxix. xliii. *Hist. August.* tom. i. Edit. Var.

‡ Euseb. *Demonstrat. Evangel.* lib. iii. p. 134.

§ Orig. *contra Cels.* lib. i. p. 7. 22. 30.

|| See his words in Cyril *contra Julian.* lib. vi. p. 121. Edit. Spanheim.

they endeavoured to turn it to the reproach of Christians, that they believed in, and worshipped, one that had been crucified. It cannot be expected indeed, that they should own, that he really rose again from the dead on the third day, as he himself had foretold; but they acknowledge, that his disciples declared that he did so, and professed to have seen him, and conversed with him, after his resurrection. This appeareth from the testimony of Celsus, at the same time that he endeavours to ridicule the account given by the Evangelists of Christ's resurrection.* The Jews, by pretending that the disciples stole away the body of Jesus, whilst the soldiers that were appointed to guard it slept, plainly acknowledged, that the body did not remain in the sepulchre where it had been laid after his crucifixion; and that therefore he might have risen from the dead, for any thing they could prove to the contrary. The early and remarkable diffusion of Christianity, notwithstanding all the difficulties it had to encounter with, and the persecutions to which the professors of it were exposed, is a very important fact, and which, as the case was circumstanced, tends very much to confirm the truth of the gospel accounts. And this is very fully attested by heathen writers, though it cannot be expected, that they would ascribe this propagation of Christianity to its proper causes, the force of truth, and a divine power accompanying it.

Tacitus, in a passage where he expresseth himself in a manner that shows he was strongly prejudiced against Christianity, informs us, that there was a *great multitude* of Christians at Rome in Nero's time, which was in little more than thirty years after the death of our Saviour; and gives an account of the terrible torments and sufferings to which they were exposed.† Julian, speaking of the Evangelist John, whom he represents as one of Christ's own disciples, saith, that in his time a great multitude, in most of the cities of Greece and Italy, were seized with that disease (for so he calls Christianity), and that John, observing this, was encouraged to assert that Christ was God, which none of the other apostles had done.‡ And we learn from the younger Pliny, that in the reign of Trajan, *i. e.* about seventy years after our Lord's crucifixion, the Christian faith had made such a progress in several parts of the Roman empire, that the temples of the gods were almost desolate: their solemn sacred rites long neglected; and that there were very few that would buy the sacrifices.§ It cannot be expected, that heathens, continuing such, should acknowledge that the Christians were right in their notions of religion; but the last mentioned celebrated heathen gives a noble testimony to the innocency of their lives and manners, and that they bound themselves by the most sacred engagements to the practice of righteousness and virtue, and not to allow themselves in vice and wickedness, falsehood and impurity. Even Celsus, than whom Christianity never had a more bitter enemy, owns, that there were among Christians *many tempe-*

* Orig. contra Cels. lib. ii. p. 94. 96, 97. lib. vii. p. 355.

† Tacit. Annal. lib. xv.

‡ See the passage in Cyril, lib. x. p. 327.

§ Plin. lib. x. Ep. 97. ad Trajan.

rate, modest, and understanding persons."* And Julian recommends to his heathen pontiff Arsacius the example of the Christians, for their kindness and humanity to strangers, and not only to those of their own religion, but to the heathens; and for their apparent sanctity of life; and this he supposes to be the chief cause why Christianity had made such a progress.† If none but Christian writers had celebrated the constancy of the ancient martyrs, some would have been ready to have suspected, that they feigned this to do them honour, or, at least, greatly heightened it; but it appeareth from the undoubted testimonies of the above mentioned Pliny, of Arrian, who flourished under the reign of Hadrian, and of the emperor Marcus Antoninus, that the ancient Christians were very remarkable for their fortitude and contempt of torments and death, and for their inflexible firmness and constancy to their religion under the greatest sufferings.‡

Though therefore it were absurd to expect, that the enemies of Christianity, continuing such, should directly attest the truth and certainty of the main facts on which the Christian religion is founded; yet we have several testimonies from them, that contribute not a little to the confirmation of those facts. Besides which, what ought to have great weight with us, we have the testimony of persons who were once Jews or heathens, and strongly prejudiced against the Christian system, who yet, upon the convincing evidence they had of those facts, were themselves brought over to the religion of Jesus.§ Of such persons there were great numbers even in the first age, the age in which the facts were done, and in which they had the best opportunity of inquiring into the truth and certainty of them. But there could not be a more remarkable instance of this kind than the apostle Paul. Never was there any man, more strongly prejudiced against Christianity than he; which had carried him so far, that he was very active in persecuting the professors of it, and thought that in doing so he had done God good service. He was at the same time a person of great parts and acuteness, and who had a learned education; yet he was brought over to the Christian faith by a divine power and evidence, which he was not able to resist; and thenceforth did more than any other of the apostles to propagate the religion of Jesus; though thereby he not only forfeited all his hopes of worldly interest and advancement, but exposed himself to a succession of the most grievous reproaches, persecutions, and sufferings; all which he bore with an invincible constancy, and even with a divine exultation and joy. In his admirable epistles, which were undeniably written in the first age of Christianity, and than which no writings can bear more uncontested marks of genuine purity and integrity, there are continual references to the principal facts recorded in the gospels, as of undoubted truth and certainty. And it manifestly appeareth, that great miracles were then wrought in the name of Jesus, and that extraordinary gifts were poured forth

* Orig. contra Cels. lib. i. p. 22.

† Julian, Ep. xlix. ad Arsac.

‡ Plin. ubi sup. Arrian Epict. lib. iv. cap. 7. Marcus Anton. lib. xi. 3.

§ See Addison's Treatise of the Christian Religion, sect. iii. iv.

upon the disciples. And why should not his testimony in favour of Christianity be of the greatest force? Must it be disregarded because of his turning Christian, *i. e.* because he was so convinced of those facts by the strongest evidence, that it over-ruled all his prejudices, and brought him over to Christianity, in opposition to all his former notions, inclinations, and interests? Whereas it is this very thing that giveth his testimony a peculiar force.* And if he had not turned Christian, his testimony in favour of Christianity, if he had given any, would not have had so great weight, as being insufficient for his own conviction; or it would have been rejected as a forgery, under pretence that he could not say and believe such things without embracing the Christian faith.

This very pretence has been made use of to set aside the remarkable testimony of Josephus. And indeed, if that testimony be genuine (and a great deal has been strongly urged to prove it so, at least for the substance of it), it must be acknowledged, that he was far from being an enemy to Christianity, though he was perhaps too much a courtier openly to profess it.

There is another argument, which the ingenious author of these Letters proposeth, and upon which he layeth no small stress, as if it were a demonstration against the divine authority of the Christian religion. He observes, that—"the writers of the Romish religion have attempted to show, that the text of the holy writ is on many accounts insufficient to be the sole criterion of orthodoxy;" and he apprehends they have shown it: "And the writers of the reformed religion have erected their batteries against tradition: and that they have jointly laid their axes to the root of Christianity: that men will be apt to reason upon what they have advanced, that there remains at this time no standard at all of Christianity: and that, by consequence, either this religion was not originally of divine institution, or else God has not provided effectually for preserving the genuine purity of it, and the gates of hell have actually prevailed, in contradiction to his promise, against the Church. He must be worse than an atheist that affirms the last; and therefore the best effect of this reasoning that can be hoped for is, that men should fall into Theism, and subscribe to the first;"—*viz.* that the Christian religion was not originally of divine institution.† He seems to think this dilemma unanswerable; and in order to this, he pronounceth, on the side of the Romish church, that their writers have shown, that the sacred text is—"insufficient to be the sole criterion of orthodoxy;"—or, as he afterwards expresseth it, that—"it hath not that authenticity, clearness, and precision, which are necessary to establish it as a divine and certain rule of faith and practice."—Why his Lordship giveth the preference to the Romish divines in this controversy, is very evident. It is because it best answereth the design he hath in view; which manifestly is, to subvert the credit

* See this clearly and solidly argued in Sir George Lyttleton's excellent Observations on the Conversion and Apostleship of St. Paul.

† Bolingbroke's Works, vol. i. p. 179, 180, 181.

and authority of the Christian religion, and leave it nothing to depend upon but the *force of education, and the civil and ecclesiastical power.*

It cannot be denied, that some writers of the Romish Church, whilst they have endeavoured to show that the scripture is insufficient to be a complete rule of faith and practice, have said as much to expose the sacred text, as if they were in league with the infidels against it, though they, as well as we, profess to own its divine original. The enemies of Christianity have not failed to take advantage of this. And indeed there cannot be a greater absurdity than to suppose, that God should inspire men to reveal his will to mankind, and to instruct them in the way of salvation, and order it so, that they should commit that revelation to writing, for the use and benefit of his church; and yet that it should be insufficient to answer the end, or to guide those that, in the sincerity of their hearts, and with the attention which becometh them in an affair of such infinite importance, apply themselves to the understanding and practising of it.

What his Lordship here offers (and it contains the sum of what has been advanced by the Romish writers on this subject), is this—“I am sure that experience, from the first promulgation of Christianity to this hour, shows abundantly, with how much ease and success, the most opposite, the most extravagant, nay, the most impious opinions, and the most contradictory faiths, may be founded on the same text, and plausibly defended by the same authority.”*—This way of arguing beareth a near affinity to that which lieth at the foundation of all scepticism, viz. that there is no certain criterion of truth, or right reason, because reason is pretended for the most contradictory opinions; and that it is impossible to be certain of any thing, because of the differences among mankind about every thing; that there are no certain principles at all, even in natural religion or morality; since there are none, not even those relating to the existence and perfections of God, a Providence, a future state, the natural differences of good and evil, but what have been controverted, and that by persons who have pretended to learning, to wisdom, and philosophy. But the absurdity of this way of arguing is very evident. The principle is fallacious, that whatever hath been controverted is uncertain. As well might it be said, that whatever is capable of being abused is not good or useful. It doth not follow, that the scriptures are not sufficiently clear and determinate to be a rule of faith and practice in all that is essential or necessary to salvation, because there have been men in every age that have interpreted them in different senses. The plainest passages in any writings whatsoever may be perverted; nor is men's differing about the meaning of the sacred text any argument against its certainty or perspicuity. Laws may be of great use, though they do not absolutely exclude chicanery and evasion. That can never be a good argument to prove, that the scriptures are not a rule to be de-

* Works, vol. i. p. 179.

pended upon, which would equally prove, that no revelation that God could give could possibly be a rule of faith and practice, or of any use to guide men to truth and happiness. If God should make a revelation of his will, for instructing mankind in what it most nearly concerneth them to know, and for directing them in the way of salvation (the possibility of which cannot be denied by any theist), and should for this purpose appoint a code to be published, containing doctrines and laws; it may be justly questioned, whether it could possibly be made so clear and explicit, as that all men in all ages should agree in their sense of it. This could hardly be expected, except God should miraculously interpose, with an irresistible influence, to cause them all to think the same way, and give them the same precise ideas of things, the same measures of natural abilities, and exactly the same means and opportunities for acquiring improvement, the same sagacity, the same leisure, the same diligence; and except he should exert his divine power in an extraordinary manner, for subduing or removing all their prejudices, and over-ruling their different passions, humours, inclinations, and interests; and should place them all exactly in the same situation and circumstances. And this would be by no means consistent with the wisdom of the divine government, or with the nature of man, and his freedom as a moral agent, and with the methods and orders of Providence. Nor is there any necessity for so extraordinary a procedure; for it would be absurd to the last degree to pretend, that the scripture can be of no use to any man, except all men were to agree about it; or that it is not sufficiently clear to answer the end, if there be any persons that pervert or abuse it.

Yet, after all the clamour that has been raised about differences among Christians as to the sense of Scripture, there are many things of great importance, about which there hath been in all ages a very general agreement among professed Christians: They are agreed, that there is one God, who made heaven and earth, and all things which are therein: That he preserveth all things by the word of his Power, and governeth all things by his Providence: That he is infinitely powerful, wise, and good, and is to be loved, feared, adored, obeyed, above all: That as there is one God, so there is one Mediator between God and man, Jesus Christ *the righteous*, whom he, in his infinite love and mercy, sent into the world to save and to redeem us: That he came to instruct us by his doctrine, and bring a clear revelation of the divine will, and to set before us a bright and most perfect example for our imitation: That he submitted to the most grievous sufferings, and to death itself, for our sakes, that he might obtain eternal redemption for us: That he rose again from the dead, and ascended into heaven, and is now crowned with glory and honour, and ever liveth to make intercession for us: That through him, and in his name, we are to offer up our prayers, and hope for the acceptance of our persons and services, and for gracious assistances in the performance of our duty: That in him there is a new covenant established, and published to the world, in which there is a free and universal offer of pardon and mercy to all the truly peni-

tent, and a most express promise of eternal life, as the reward of our sincere, though imperfect obedience : That it is not enough to have a bare speculative faith, but we must be formed into an holy and godlike temper ; and, in order to be prepared for that future happiness, must live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world : That there shall be a resurrection both of the just and of the unjust, and a future judgment, when Christ shall judge the world in the Father's name, and give to every man according to his deeds : That the wicked shall be doomed to the most grievous punishments ; and the righteous shall be unspeakably happy to all eternity. These are things of great consequence, and which have been generally acknowledged by Christians in all ages. And if there have been several things advanced by those that call themselves Christians, which are not well consistent with these generally-acknowledged principles ; if there have been controversies among them about points of considerable importance, as well as many contentions about things of little or no moment, this is no argument against the divine authority or usefulness of the sacred writings. Those that *wrest the Scriptures* must be accountable to him that gave them, for that perversion and abuse ; as men must be accountable for the abuse of their reason ; but this is far from proving, that therefore the Scriptures answer no valuable purpose, and could not be of a divine original. Still it is true, that whosoever will, with a teachable and attentive mind, and an upright intention to know and do the will of God, apply himself to read and consider the holy Scriptures, in an humble dependence on God's gracious assistances, will find vast advantage for instructing him in the knowledge of religion, and engaging him to the practice of it, and for guiding him in the way of salvation.

It appears then, that the foundation, on which this formidable dilemma is built, will not bear. There is at this time a *standard for Christianity* ; even the doctrines and laws of our Saviour and his apostles, as contained in the holy Scriptures. It must be and is acknowledged by all that profess themselves Christians, that whatever is revealed in those sacred books is true and certain, and whatever can be shown to be contrary to what is there revealed is false. The Romanists as well as Protestants own the divinity and authenticity of the sacred text, though for particular views they would join unwritten tradition with it ; and are for giving the church alone the authority to interpret the Scriptures. The reason of their conduct is evident. It is not because they look upon the sacred text to be so obscure and ambiguous, that it cannot be understood by the people ; but because they think the people, if left to themselves, will understand it so far as to see the inconsistency there is between true primitive Christianity, as laid down in the New Testament, and the papal system, and because their corrupt additions to Christianity cannot be proved by Scripture authority.

I have already taken notice of what he saith concerning the fatal blow that Christianity received by the resurrection of letters. I suppose we are to take his word as a decisive proof of this ; for no

other proof of it is offered. But it may be affirmed on the contrary, that true primitive Christianity, that is, Christianity as laid down in the New Testament, had then a glorious revival. Many corrupt additions that had been made to it were thrown off. It hath never been better understood, nor its evidences set in a clearer light, than since that time. Some of the most admired names in the republic of letters have thought themselves worthily employed in endeavouring to illustrate the beauties of Scripture, and to clear its difficulties. It were easy to show, if it were not a thing so well known as to render it needless, that those who have done most for the revival and spreading of learning and knowledge in all its branches, and who were most celebrated for their genius, judgment, various reading, and probity, have been persons that expressed a great admiration for the holy Scriptures, and an hearty zeal for Christianity.

Thus I have considered what the late Lord Bolingbroke hath offered in these Letters against the authority of the holy Scripture, and the Christian religion, as far as may be necessary to take off the force of the objections he hath raised against it, and which seem to have nothing in them proportioned to the unusual confidence with which they are advanced. It is hard to see what good end could be proposed by such an attempt. But perhaps it may be thought an advantage, that by "discovering error in first principles founded upon facts, and breaking the charm, the enchanted castle, the steepy rock, the burning lake will disappear."* And there are persons, no doubt, that would be well pleased to see it proved, that Christianity is no better than delusion and enchantment; and particularly, that the wicked have nothing to fear from *the burning lake*, some apprehensions of which may probably tend to make them uneasy in their vicious courses. But I should think, that a true lover of virtue, and of mankind, who impartially considers the purity of the gospel morals, the excellent tendency of its doctrines and precepts, and the power of its motives for engaging men to the practice of piety and virtue, and deterring them from vice and wickedness, will be apt to look upon it as a very ill employment, to endeavour to expose this religion to contempt, and to set bad men free from the wholesome terrors it inspires, and deprive good men of the sublime hopes and sacred joys it yields. But Christianity hath withstood much more formidable attacks, and will, I doubt not, continue to approve itself to those that examine it, and the evidences by which it is established, with minds free from vicious prejudices, and with that sincerity and simplicity of heart, that seriousness and attention, which becomes them in an affair of such vast importance.

* See his Letter on the Use of Study and Retirement, vol. ii. p. 221.

LETTER XXXV.

The Account of the Deistical Writers closed.—General Reflections on those Writers —The high Encomiums they bestow upon themselves, and their own Performances and the Contempt they express for others.—They differ among themselves about the most important Principles of natural Religion.—The unfair Methods they take with regard to Christianity.—No Writers discover stronger Marks of Prejudice.—The Guilt and Danger of rejecting the Christian Revelation.—An Aversion to the Laws of the Gospel, one of the principal Causes of Infidelity.—Terms proposed by the Deists for making up the Differences between them and the Christians.—Their Pretence of placing Religion wholly in Practice, and not in useless Speculations considered.

SIR,

I SHALL now close the account of the deistical writers who have appeared among us for above a century past, and shall take occasion to subjoin some reflections which seem naturally to arise upon this subject.

If we were to judge of the merit of these writers, by the encomiums they have bestowed upon their own performances, and the account they have given of their designs and views, we should be apt to entertain a very favourable opinion of them, as persons to whom the world is under great obligations. Dr. Tindal begins and ends his book with declaring, that his scheme “tends to the honour of God, and the happiness of human societies;” that there “is none who wish well to mankind, but must also wish his hypothesis to be true;” and that “it most effectually prevents the growth both of scepticism and enthusiasm.” The “Moral Philosopher” everywhere speaks very advantageously of himself, as having nothing in view but to vindicate and promote the cause of *real religion*, and *moral truth* and *righteousness*. The author of “Christianity not founded on Argument,” spends some pages in recapitulating and extolling his own work. The same observation may be made concerning the author of the “Resurrection of Jesus considered.” He declares “that reason is his only rule, and the displaying truth his only aim: that his design is to recover the dignity of virtue, and to promote that veneration for wisdom and truth, which have been destroyed by faith.”* And he concludes with expressing his hope, that his “treatise will be of real service to religion, and make men’s practice better, when they find they have nothing else to depend upon for happiness, here and hereafter, but their own personal righteousness, with their love of wisdom and truth.”† In like manner Mr. Chubb has, in his “Farewell to his Readers,” with great solemnity, told the world how much they are obliged to him for

* Resurrection of Jesus considered, p. 72.

† Ibid. p. 82.

having taken care to leave them his instructions in matters of the highest importance. Mr. Hume assumes the merit of throwing light upon the most *curious* and *sublime subjects*, with regard to which all the *received systems* had been *extremely defective*, and which *had escaped the most elaborate scrutiny and examination*. He proposes to "reconcile profound inquiry with clearness, and truth with novelty," and to "undermine the foundations of an abstruse philosophy, which seems to have served hitherto only as a shelter to superstition, and a cover to absurdity and error."* And he begins his "Essay upon Miracles" with declaring, that "he flatters himself that he has discovered an argument, which, if just, will with the wise and learned be an everlasting check to all kinds of superstitious delusion, and consequently will be useful as long as the world endures."† Lord Bolingbroke makes the most pompous professions of his intentions to "separate truth from falsehood, knowledge from ignorance, revelations of the Creator from inventions of the creature, dictates of reason from the sallies of enthusiasm—and to go to the root of that error, which sustains our pride, fortifies our prejudices, and gives pretence to delusion—to discover the true nature of human knowledge—how far it is real, and how it begins to be fantastical—that the gaudy visions of error being dispelled, men may be accustomed to the simplicity of truth."‡

Nor do these gentlemen only join in representing themselves as persons of extraordinary penetration, and of the most upright intentions: but they sometimes seem to claim a kind of infallibility. They talk of having their "understandings irradiated with the beams of immutable eternal reason, so that they are sure not to run into any errors of moment." And that they have an "infallible mark and criterion of divine truth, in which men cannot be mistaken."§ They propose to direct men to "the eternal and invariable rule of right and wrong, as to an infallible guide, and as the solid ground of peace and safety."|| They assure us, that *deism*, or the religion they would recommend, is "bright as the heavenly light, and free from all ambiguities; that, it makes all men happy that embrace it; that it perfectly satisfies all doubts, and procures the troubled soul unshaken rest."¶

And as they take care to recommend themselves, and their own writings, to the esteem and admiration of mankind, so they give a very disadvantageous idea of those that stand up as advocates for revealed religion. They speak in a sneering contemptuous way of such books as Stillingfleet's "*Origines Sacrae*," Dr. Clarke's "*Discourse of Natural and Revealed Religion, the Analogy of Reason and Revelation, &c.*" and the excellent discourses at Boyle's lec-

* Hume's Philosophical Essays, p. 18, 19. and his Enquiry concerning the Principles of Morals, p. 172.

† See Hume's Philosophical Essays, p. 174.

‡ Bolingbroke's Works, vol. iii. p. 328. 331.

§ Christianity as old as the Creation, p. 336. edit. 8vo. Mor. Phil. vol. i. p. 92.

|| Chubb's Posthumous Works, vol. ii. p. 249.

¶ Resurrection of Jesus considered, p. 9.

tures.* A writer of great note among them thinks fit to represent the Christian divines, as, for the most part, "mortal enemies to the exercise of reason, and below brutes."† Another charges them, as acting as if they "wanted either understanding or honesty." And he assures us, that "those who think most freely, have the least share of faith, and that in proportion as our understandings are improved, faith diminishes." The same writer expressly calls it *foolish faith*, and saith, that "in this glorious time of light and liberty, this divine hag, with her pious witchcrafts, which were brought forth in darkness, and nourished by obscurity, faint at the approach of day, and vanish upon sight."‡ And one of their latest and most admired authors have thought fit to pass this arrogant censure upon all that believe the Christian religion—that "Whosoever is moved by faith to assent to it, is conscious of a continued miracle in his own person, which subverts all the principles of his understanding, and gives him a determination to believe whatever is most contrary to custom and experience."§ Lord Bolingbroke brings it as a charge against both clergy and laity, who believe Christianity, that they have been hitherto either "not impartial, or sagacious enough, to take an accurate examination, or not honest enough to communicate it."|| And he takes all occasions to pour forth the most virulent contempt and reproach upon the most eminent Christian divines and philosophers, both ancient and modern. Many instances of this kind have been observed above in this work, 22nd Letter and Letter 25th.

After such specious professions, it would be natural to expect, that these gentlemen should oblige the world with clearer *directions* than have been hitherto given to lead mankind to truth and happiness. But this is far from being the case: they indeed all join in endeavouring to subvert revealed religion, but they are by no means agreed what to substitute in its room. They often speak magnificently of keeping close to the *eternal reason and nature of things*, and profess a high esteem for what they call the *uncorrupted religion of reason and nature, which is always invariably the same*.¶ But when they come to explain themselves more particularly, it is not easy to know what they intend by it. Some of them have reckoned among the principles of natural religion, and which are of great importance to mankind, the belief of God's universal and particular providence, his moral government of the world and of mankind, the obligations we are under to pray to him and worship him, the natural differences of moral good and evil, man's free agency, the immortality of the soul, and a future state of retributions. Others of their applauded writers deny several of these principles, or, at least, represent them as absolutely uncertain. And though, when they want to make a fair appearance to the world, these prin-

* Christianity not founded on Argument.

† Christianity as old as the Creation, p. 250, 251.

‡ Resurrection of Jesus considered, p. 4. 8. 72.

§ Bolingbroke's Letters on the Study and Use of History, vol. I. p. 181.

|| Chubb's Posthumous Works, vol. ii. in the Appendix.

§ Ibid.

ciples are to pass as making a part of the deist's creed, yet it cannot be denied, that the general effect and tendency of their writings has rather been to unsettle these foundations, and introduce an universal scepticism and indifference to all religion. When such persons therefore set up for benefactors to mankind, it puts one in mind of the boasts of the Epicureans, who speak in high terms of the obligations the world was under to their great master Epicurus, for undertaking the glorious work of rescuing mankind from the unsufferable yoke of superstition, by freeing them from the fear of God, and the apprehensions of providence, and a future state of retributions. And even with regard to those of the deists that put on the fairest appearances, I think it may be truly said, that it is not among them that we must look for the best and most perfect scheme, even of natural religion. What has been done to greatest advantage this way has been done by Christian writers, who have produced the noblest systems of natural religion, and have taken pains to establish its great principles on the surest foundations. And to what can this be reasonably ascribed, but to the clearer light which the Christian revelation hath thrown upon this subject, and the excellent helps and assistances it hath brought us? It appeareth then, that if it be of any advantage to mankind to have natural religion set in a clear light, and strongly enforced, the deists have no right to appropriate the honour of this to themselves, or to set up for benefactors to mankind on this account. Much less have they reason to value themselves upon their opposition to the Christian religion. If the account some of themselves have given of the nature and design of Christianity be just, they must be very badly employed that endeavour to subvert its credit and authority. Lord Herbert calls it the *best religion*, and saith, that all its doctrines, ordinances, precepts, sacraments, aim at the establishment of those five important articles, in which he makes all religion to consist.* Dr. Tindal owns, that "Christianity itself, stripped of all additions that policy, mistake, and the circumstances of time have made to it, is a most holy religion."† The *Moral Philosopher* frequently expresseth himself to the same purpose; and Mr. Chubb acknowledgeth, that "Christianity, if it could be separated from every thing that hath been blended with it, yields a much clearer light, and is a more safe guide to mankind, than any other traditionary religion, as being better adapted to improve and perfect human nature."‡ Lord Bolingbroke represents it as a *most amiable and useful institution*, and that its *natural tendency is to promote the peace and happiness of mankind*. That the *system of religion* it teaches is a *complete system*, to all the *purposes of religion natural and revealed*,—and might have continued so, to the *unspeakable advantage of mankind, if it had been propagated with the same simplicity with which it was taught by Christ himself*.§ If therefore they had laid out their pains in en-

* Herbert relig. laici, p. 9, 10.

† Christianity as old as the Creation, p. 382. edit. 8vo.

‡ Chubb's Posthumous Works, vol. ii. p. 370.

§ Several other Passages to this purpose are collected above in the 31st Letter.

deavouring to separate true original Christianity from the corrupt additions that have been made to it, and to engage men to a stricter adherence, in principle and practice, to the religion of Jesus in its primitive purity and simplicity, as delivered by Christ and his apostles in the New Testament, they might have had some pretence to the character they seem willing to claim, of friends and benefactors to mankind. But the method they have taken is very different: at the same time that they have affected to commend pure original Christianity, they have used their utmost efforts to subvert its divine authority, and thus to deprive it of its influence on the minds of men, and set them loose from all obligations to believe and obey it. This is a manifest proof, that it is not merely the corruptions of Christianity that they find fault with, but the Christian revelation itself, which they have not scrupled to represent as the product of enthusiasm or imposture.

Various are the ways they have taken to destroy its credit and authority, as sufficiently appeareth from the account which hath been given in the foregoing Letters. And considering how many writers have appeared in this cause within this century past, and what liberty they have had to propose their reasonings and their objections, it can hardly be supposed they have left any thing unattempted that had the face of argument, by which they thought they could answer their end. And therefore if it appears, as I hope it does, upon the view which hath been taken of them, that their most plausible objections have been solidly answered; it is to be hoped, that their attempts, however ill intended, will turn to the advantage of the Christian cause; as it will thence appear, how little its enemies have been able to say against it, considered in its original purity, even where they have had the utmost freedom of proposing their sentiments. They have appealed to the bar of reason; the advocates for Christianity have followed them to the bar, and have fairly shown, that the evidences of revealed religion are such as approve themselves to impartial reason, and, if taken together, are fully sufficient to satisfy an honest and unprejudiced mind.

Although therefore it cannot but give great concern to all that have a just zeal for our holy religion, that so many, instead of being duly thankful for the glorious light of the gospel which shineth among us, have used their utmost endeavours to expose it to contempt and reproach: yet, on the other hand, it yields matter of agreeable reflection, that there have been as many valuable defences of Christianity published among us within this century past, as can be produced in any age. Besides those mentioned in the foregoing Letters, there have been many excellent treatises, setting forth the reasons and evidences of the Christian religion, which the nature of the work I have been engaged in did not lead me to take notice of, as they were not written professedly in answer to any of those deistical books which I had occasion to mention.

It is a reflection that must obviously occur, upon a review of the

account which hath been given of the authors who have appeared against Christianity, that they have been far from contenting themselves with sober reasoning, as might be expected in a case on which so much depends. The weapons they have chiefly made use of, are those of misrepresentation and ridicule, and often even low jest and buffoonery. This seems to be a presumption in favour of Christianity, that its adversaries are themselves sensible that little can be done against it, in a way of plain reason and argument. It is true, there are no writers who make greater pretensions to freedom of thought, or inveigh more strongly against prepossession and bigotry; so that one would expect, that they should everywhere discover minds open to conviction and evidence: and yet it may safely be affirmed, that no writers whatsoever discover stronger signs of prejudice; and there is great reason to complain that they have not carried on the debate with that fairness and candour which becomes the importance of the subject.*

Any one that is acquainted with their writings must be sensible, that it is not their way to make a fair and just representation of true original Christianity as contained in the Holy Scriptures. They throw it into false lights, in order to expose it, and often charge it with corruptions and abuses, which they themselves well know do not really and originally belong to it. In some of their books which are written in the way of dialogue, they introduce Christian dialogists, who are to make a show of defending the Christian cause; but it is evident that it is only to betray it. These dialogists make a most despicable figure in their writings, and are scarcely allowed to say any thing that discovers learning or even common sense, nor ever fairly state the argument or evidence on the side of Christianity. Any one that has read Tindal's "Christianity as old as the Creation," or the first volume of the "Moral Philosopher," cannot but have observed this.

In their treatment of the scriptures, they have every-where discovered an eager desire and resolution to expose and run them down at any rate. In examining writings of venerable antiquity and authority, a man of candour, and an impartial enquirer after truth, would be inclined to put the most favourable interpretation upon them that they will bear; but instead of this, these writers seem only solicitous to find out something that may make the scriptures appear ridiculous. They take pains to wrest and pervert them, as if they thought it meritorious to treat those sacred writings in a manner that would not be borne with regard to any other books of the least credit. Of this many instances might be produced. If they meet with any passages of scripture that have difficulty in them, and which at this distance are not easy to explain; and some such passages must be expected in books of so great antiquity, written in times and places, as well as dialects, so different from our own; this is immediately improved, as if it were sufficient to

* See this clearly shown in Dr. Duchal's Preface to his excellent *Sermons on the presumptive Evidences of Christianity*.

show that the whole sacred volume is false, or so corrupted as not be depended on. Thus a late celebrated author, who has endeavoured to expose the scripture history, has thought the curse said to have been pronounced by Noah upon Canaan, sufficient to destroy the credit of it; but not to repeat what has been offered for explaining or vindicating that passage, supposing we were not able in any manner to account for it, would it not be far more reasonable and becoming a man of sense and candour, to suppose that in so short a relation some circumstances are omitted, which, if known, would set it in a fair light, rather than, on account of an obscure passage, to reject and discard the authority of the whole?

What can be a plainer proof of the power of their prejudices, than to advance rules, in judging of the truth and credibility of scripture history, which would be absolutely rejected and exploded, if applied to any other history in the world; and to reject the evidence as insufficient with regard to the facts recorded in the gospel, which they themselves would count sufficient with regard to any other facts done in past ages? What greater sign of prejudice, than when they are not able to invalidate the truth of the gospel records, or to show that they have not been safely transmitted to us, to fly out into general clamours and invectives against all historical evidence whatsoever, as absolutely uncertain? The author of "Christianity not founded on Argument" speaks out, and plainly declares that no man ought to believe any thing but what he sees with his own eyes. "To believe a thing," says he, "because another man says he saw it, is a very unprecedented and new sort of logic."* And it is a constant topic with these writers to declaim against every thing as uncertain that comes to us through the hands of fallible men. As if no man could be sure that there is such a place as Paris, except he had been there, or that there had been such a person as Queen Elizabeth. Moral certainty is ridiculed and exposed; though nothing can be more plain, from the very frame of our nature, and the circumstances in which we are placed by divine providence here on earth, than that the author of our beings designed that we should in many cases be determined by moral evidence and testimony, and that we should acquiesce in it, as fully sufficient.† It is what all men, even the wisest, do in numberless instances, and think it reasonable to do so. And to reject all this at once, is a certain sign of their being reduced to the last distress in point of argument. And if the advocates for revelation were driven to such shifts, they would no doubt be treated as irreconcilable enemies to reason and common sense.

Many other things might be mentioned which show the strength of their prejudices against Christianity. They often make use of arguments, which, if they were good for any thing, would hold for casting off all religion, all certainty of reason, all learning and instruction, and, if pursued to their genuine consequences, would in-

* "Christianity not founded on Argument," p. 53.

† See this excellently stated and cleared in Ditton on the Resurrection, part 2d.

roduce universal barbarism. And what a strange prejudice does this argue, to have such an aversion for Christianity, as to be willing to throw off all religion, learning, and knowledge, rather than admit it! If they can but expose revealed religion, it seems to give them very little concern, though natural religion falls with it; some of their admired authors argue against all methods of education, all attempts to instruct children in the principles of religion or morality. This is an extraordinary refinement of the present age. The best and wisest men of all former ages have looked upon it to be a thing of vast consequence, to season the minds of children betimes, with good and just notions of things. But some of our modern free-thinkers have, in their superior wisdom, found out, that the best way would be to leave children entirely to themselves, without any instruction or cultivation at all. This is the scheme of the author of "Christianity not founded on Argument;" and another of their applauded writers, Dr. Tindal, seems sometimes to declare against all instruction, by word or writing, as useless or needless, and as only tending to turn men aside from attending to the things themselves, and to the pure simple dictates of nature.

Their desire at any rate to subvert Christianity has involved them in many inconsistencies. Sometimes, to show that there is no need or use of divine revelation, the powers of reason in matters of religion are mightily extolled, as if it were able to do every thing by its own force, without any assistance. At other times, to render us indifferent to religion, reason is degraded; and it is expressly declared, that "it is not her proper province to judge of religion at all; nor is this an affair in which she has the least concern."* Sometimes all men, even those that cannot read their mother tongue, are supposed to be so clear-sighted, as to be able, without any instruction, to know the whole of religion. At other times, the bulk of mankind are represented as unable to know any thing of religion, and therefore not under any obligation to believe it, and as not capable of judging where there is any thing of induction or inference in the case.

If the doctrines of the gospel appear, upon a strict examination, to be such as right reason approves when once they are discovered, then it is urged that reason alone might have discovered them, and that a revelation in such cases is perfectly needless, and of no use at all. But if there be any thing in these discoveries which was not discoverable by unassisted reason, and which we could not have known but by extraordinary revelation, this is made an objection against receiving it; and to believe in that case is branded as an implicit faith, and a giving up our reason.

Sometimes the apostles are represented as hot-brained enthusiasts, who really believed themselves to be inspired of God, and were so mad as to imagine that they wrought miracles, and had extraordinary gifts of the Holy Ghost, when there was no such

* Christianity not founded on Argument, p. 7.

thing. At other times they are represented as artful impostors, who formed a scheme of worldly power and grandeur under spiritual pretences, and forged facts and evidences which they knew to be false.

The character of our blessed Lord, as set before us in the gospel, is so excellent and admirable, that the enemies of our holy religion know not well how to fix a stain upon it. But when they can find nothing in his doctrine, or in his temper or conduct, that savours of the spirit of this world, or of a carnal policy, they are willing to suppose that under these specious appearances he concealed ambitious and interested views, which were to take effect in the proper time. Lord Shaftesbury had insinuated this; and it was a part of Mr. Woolston's scheme to charge Christ with a secret design of aspiring to temporal power and dominion, and with encouraging the Jews to take him for their king. The same thing is pretended by the "Moral Philosopher," and by the author of "The Resurrection of Jesus considered." Thus, this malignant insinuation is repeated by one of these writers after another, without any thing to support it but the malice of the accusers, and an earnest desire to find a flaw in the most perfect character; since both the whole of his life and conduct, and the entire strain and tendency of the religion he taught, afford the strongest proofs to the contrary. And at this rate the best and noblest characters may pass for the worst; and the greater marks there are of self-denial and disinterestedness, the greater will the ground of suspicion be.

Sometimes Jesus and his apostles are represented as teaching wholly in a way of authority, and never applying to men's reason at all, and even absolutely forbidding them to use their understandings. This is what the author of "Christianity not founded on Argument" has laboured to prove. At other times, it is asserted, as it is particularly by the "Moral Philosopher," that Christ appealed wholly to men's own reason, and would not have them take any thing upon his authority at all as a teacher sent from God, or upon any other evidence than the reason and nature of the thing.*

When they are not able to produce any ancient evidences against Christianity, they presume upon it as a certain thing, that there was evidence formerly against it, but that this evidence was destroyed, and that it was because of the strength of the evidence, that it was found necessary to destroy it. Thus, these gentlemen know how to turn even the want of evidence against Christianity, into an argument against its truth. I shall not here repeat what has been above offered to show the vanity and unreasonableness of this pretence. I shall only observe, that, according to their usual way of repeating continually the same objections, this has been urged with great confidence by Mr. Woolston, by the author of "The Resurrection of Jesus considered," and very lately by a writer of quality, who hath distinguished himself in the same cause.

* Moral Philosopher, vol. ii. p. 23, 24, 41, 42.

Many other instances might be produced, by which it appears, that no writers whatsoever show more apparent signs of strong prejudice and prepossession, than those that honour themselves with the title of *Free-thinkers*. It were greatly to be wished for their own sakes, as well as for the sake of others, whom they take pains to pervert, that they would endeavour to divest themselves of their prejudices, and would consider the evidences for Christianity with that seriousness and attention which becomes them in an affair of such vast importance. I am sensible indeed, that many are ready to represent this as a thing of no consequence at all. They look upon all forms of religion to be alike with regard to the favour of God, and that it is perfectly indifferent what a man professes, provided he be a man of virtue. But real piety and virtue will engage a man to receive whatever he has reason to think is a true signification of the divine will. And if Christianity be indeed a true revelation from God, as it claims to be, and if the declarations there made in the name of God are to be depended upon, it cannot possibly be a matter of indifference, whether those to whom it is published and made known, receive or reject it: the believing and receiving it must in that case needs be of great consequence to our happiness, and to disbelieve and reject it is infinitely hazardous. It therefore highly concerneth us to inquire, whether Christianity be in reality a true divine revelation; whether the laws there prescribed in the name of God be indeed his laws, and be obeyed as such: whether the terms of acceptance there proposed be of his own appointment; whether the promises there made are to be regarded as his promises, and the threatenings there denounced are to be considered as really enforced by his authority. For if they really be so, and we reject them without examination, or refuse to consider them, as if they were not worthy of a serious thought, we shall be absolutely without excuse, and shall never be able to justify our conduct to God, or our own consciences.

A noted deistical author, after having insinuated that we need not give ourselves the trouble to inquire into the several pretended revelations that have appeared in the world, yet thinks fit to own, that "when a revelation which assumes a divine character comes to our own door, and offers itself to our consideration, and as it may possibly be what it is pretended to be, and as such we may possibly be interested in it, this may excite our concern to try and prove it; otherwise we can be under no obligation with regard to it."* Where he plainly supposes, that, in the case he puts, we are under an obligation to try and prove a revelation which assumes a divine character, and offers itself to our consideration. And it strengthens this, if the revelation itself, supposing it to be really given by God, does in his name require and demand our attention and submission, as a condition of our being interested in his favour. In such a case, it must be no small guilt to disregard and reject it at once without a due inquiry, but especially to cast contempt and reproach upon it, and endeavour to engage others to reject it.

* Chubb's Posthumous Works, vol. i. p. 11.

And the guilt and danger of rejecting that revelation is mightily heightened, if it should be found, that the true cause of that infidelity, and of the disregard shown to that revelation, is the strength of vicious appetite, and an aversion to the holy and excellent laws which are there prescribed. And this, it is to be feared, is the case of the generality of those among us who reject the gospel-revelation. When we see them, under pretence of disbelieving the doctrines, discarding the morals of the gospel; when with Christianity they seem to throw off the fear of God, and give themselves up to boundless licentiousness; there is too just reason to apprehend, that the true cause of their dislike to the Christian revelation, is not so much their being dissatisfied with the evidences produced for it, as because they cannot bear the restraints it lays upon their corrupt lusts and passions. The real end they aim at is expressed by one of themselves to be, "to save a soul from the dismal apprehensions of eternal damnation;" to relieve a person "from labouring under that uneasiness of mind, which he often is under, when pleasure and Christianity come in competition."* And a late noble writer mentions it as an advantage of the way of thinking he recommends, that the *burning lake will then disappear*.† And if, by shutting their eyes against the evidence, they could alter the real state of the case, and render their condition safer than it would otherwise be; if their not believing *eternal damnation* would secure them against the danger of that damnation; it would be wisely done to take pains to disbelieve it. But if their unbelief in such a case, instead of making the danger less, only aggravates their guilt, and heightens their danger, and puts them off from taking the properest methods for avoiding it, the folly of such a conduct is very apparent. Christianity professes to direct to a true and certain way, both of avoiding that future punishment, and of obtaining the greatest glory and felicity that can possibly be proposed to the human mind. But if these gentlemen will rather venture to expose themselves to that future punishment, than endeavour to prevent it by a true repentance, and by abandoning their vicious courses; and if they will choose rather to forfeit the hopes of everlasting happiness, than go on in that uniform course of piety and virtue that leads to it; there is no remedy: they must take the consequences. But certainly the bare possibility of the *wrath to come* is so dreadful a thing, that a wise man would not run the hazard of it for a few transient vicious gratifications. For what one of their own admired authors says, though in a sneering way, is a sober and momentous truth, and what the reason of mankind cannot but approve, that "where there is a hell on the other side, it is but natural prudence to take readily to the safest side."‡

I shall conclude this letter with taking notice of a proposal, made by a deistical writer, for putting an end to the important controversy

* See two Letters from a Deist to his friend, p. 17. 19; cited by Dr. Waterland in his preface to the first part of Script. Vind.

† Lord Bolingbroke's Letter on the Study and Use of History, vol. ii. p. 221.

‡ Christianity not founded on Argument, p. 88.

between the Christians and the deists. "If those learned gentlemen," says he, "that are the directors of others, will choose to give up speculative principles, and an historical faith, and insist only on that practice which will recommend men in every religion to the favour of God, the good-will of men, and peace of their own conscience, and own, that the whole of the Christian religion, which is worth contending for, are all relative and social virtues, then the contention between the Christians and deists will drop."* So then we see here upon what terms the deists are willing to be at peace with the Christian divines. They must give up *speculative principles*, and an *historical faith*. By an *historical faith*, in these gentlemen's language, must be understood faith in Jesus Christ, a belief of what is related in the gospels concerning him, concerning his person, ministry, miracles, sufferings, resurrection, ascension; and all this must be given up as of no consequence to mankind at all. And *speculative principles* must also be abandoned. And what is intended by these, and how far this demand is to extend, it is hard to know. With some that call themselves deists, the most important principles of natural religion, the belief of a providence, of the immortality of the soul, and a state of future judgment and retribution, are looked upon to be needless speculations, and either denied, or treated as matters of doubtful disputation. But let us suppose that no stress is to be laid upon any doctrines or principles at all, and that practice alone is to be insisted on, though some principles seem to lie at the foundation of a good and virtuous practice, yet still it will be found no easy matter for the Christian and deist to agree what that practice is which is to be regarded as necessary. This writer would have the divines own, that "the whole of the Christian religion, which is worth contending for, are all relative and social virtues." Here is not a word said of the duties of piety and devotion, of love, reverence, adoration, submission, affiance, and resignation towards the supreme Being, or of prayer, confession of sins, thanksgiving, praise, and the outward acts of religious homage which we owe to God. Yet this is an important part of our duty, on which Christianity, and even right reason itself, teacheth us to lay a great stress; though it is treated by many among the deists as a thing of small consequence. Nor is there any thing here said of the duties of self-government, chastity, purity, humility, temperance, and the due regulation of our appetites and passions. And when this comes to be explained, there is likely to be a wide difference between the Christians and deists, as to the particulars included in this part of our duty. It is very probable, that these gentlemen will plead for allowing much greater liberties, in indulging their sensual appetites and passions, than is consistent with the morals of the gospel, and with that purity of heart and life which Christianity requireth. And even as to relative and social virtues, in which this author makes the whole of religion to consist, the deists have often objected against that forgiveness of injuries, that charity and bene-

* Resurrection of Jesus considered, p. 83.

volence, even towards our enemies themselves, that returning good for evil, which the great author of our religion hath urged upon his disciples, both by his doctrine and by his example. It is to be feared, upon the whole, that they will be as far from agreeing to the morals as to the doctrines of the gospel; and that some of its laws and practical precepts stand more in their way, and create greater prejudices against it, than its mysteries themselves, though it is a little more plausible and decent to put the reason of their rejecting Christianity upon the latter than upon the former.

This may help us to judge, whether there be any just ground for their pretences, as if the world were greatly obliged to them, for endeavouring to take men off from useless speculations, and teaching them to lay the whole stress upon practice. The last-mentioned author concludes his treatise against the resurrection of Jesus with declaring his hope, that it "will be of real service to religion, and make men's practice better, when they shall find they have nothing else to depend upon for happiness here and hereafter, but their own personal righteousness, with their love of wisdom and truth."* And others of them have made the same boast, but very undeservedly. For can the necessity of personal obedience and righteousness be more expressly insisted upon than in the gospel of Jesus, or be bound upon us by stronger and more sacred arguments? Do these gentlemen pretend to teach more excellent morals than the Christian religion does, or to carry piety, charity, benevolence, purity of manners, and universal righteousness, to a nobler height, or to enforce the practice of it by more powerful and prevailing motives? Or, do they propose to make men's practice better, by leaving them at large, without any express divine precepts determining the particulars of their duty, and by taking away the glorious hopes and promises of the gospel, which are designed to animate us to obedience, and the awful threatenings which are there denounced against vice and wickedness?

But enough has been said of these gentlemen and their pretences; and I intended here, as a proper conclusion of this work, to have given a summary representation of the principal arguments and evidences for the truth and divinity of the Christian revelation. But as you will probably think this letter to be already of sufficient length, I choose to reserve it for the subject of my next.

I am yours, &c.

J. LELAND.

* Resurrection of Jesus considered, p. 82.

LETTER XXXVI.

An extraordinary Revelation from God to Mankind possible to be given.—The Propriety and Usefulness of such a Revelation shown.—Those to whom it is made known indispensably obliged to embrace it.—The Marks and Evidences by which we may be satisfied that such a Revelation is really given, viz. when the Revelation itself is of an excellent Nature and Tendency, and when it is accompanied by the most extraordinary Divine Attestations, especially Miracles and Prophecy.—The Proof from Miracles vindicated.—Confession of some of the Deists themselves to this Purpose.—The Revelation contained in the Holy Scriptures confirmed by a Series of the most extraordinary Works, which manifestly argued a divine Interposition.—The Nature of the Revelation itself considered.—Distinguished into three Periods, under each of which the Religion, for Substance, the same.—First, The Patriarchal Religion.—The Second relates to the Mosaical Dispensation.—The Third, which was the Perfection of all the rest, is the Christian Revelation.—The God-like Character of its Author.—The Nature and Tendency of the Religion itself particularly considered, and shown to be worthy of God.—It could not be the Effect either of Imposture or Enthusiasm, and therefore must be of divine Original.—The Christian Scheme of the Mediator wise and excellent.—The Difficulties attending it, no just Objection against Christianity.—The Conclusion.

SIR,

HAVING finished the account of the *deistical writers*, it will not be improper to lay together some considerations, relating to the reasons we have to believe that Christianity is a true revelation from God, and that therefore they to whom it is published and made known are under indispensable obligations to believe and embrace it.

With regard to revelation in general, the first thing that comes to be considered, is the possibility of it. That God can, if he thinks fit, make extraordinary discoveries of his will, and communicate important truths to one or more men, to be by them communicated to others in his name, cannot be denied with the least appearance of reason. For upon what foundation can any man go, in pretending that this is impossible? Is there any thing in it which implieth a contradiction either to the nature of God or man? This cannot be pretended, nor has any man attempted to show that it involveth a contradiction. Accordingly, the possibility of a revelation has been generally acknowledged by those who believe the existence of God and a providence, nor do I see how any man that acknowledgeth a God and a providence can consistently deny it.

And as the possibility of God's making an extraordinary revelation of his will to mankind must be acknowledged, so the propriety of it, or that it is worthy of God to grant such a revelation, supposing, which hath been unanswerably proved to have been the case in fact, mankind to have been sunk into a state of great darkness and corruption in matters of religion and morals; and that if he should grant such a revelation, for guiding men into the knowledge of im-

portant truths, or for enforcing their duty upon them, it would be a signal instance of the divine wisdom and goodness, cannot be reasonably contested. And indeed, this is no more than what some of the deists themselves have thought fit to acknowledge. The "Moral Philosopher" expressly owns it, and a remarkable passage from Mr. Chubb to the same purpose was cited in my thirteenth letter.

It greatly strengthens this, when it is considered, that several things there are of great importance to mankind to know, particularly concerning the attributes and providence of God; the most acceptable way of worshipping him; the extent of the duty we owe him, and the methods of his dealings towards his offending creatures; how far and upon what terms he will pardon their iniquities, and receive them to his grace and favour; what rewards it will please him to confer upon those that serve him in sincerity, though their obedience is mixed with infirmities and defects; and what punishment he will inflict upon obstinate presumptuous transgressors: I say, there are several things, with respect to these and such like matters, which as they relate to things invisible, or things future, and which depend upon God's most wise counsels, of which, if left to ourselves, we cannot pretend to be competent judges, we could not have a clear and full assurance of by the mere light of our own unassisted reason. It seems evident therefore that mankind stood in great need of an extraordinary revelation from God, and that this would be of the most signal advantage. And though it cannot without great rashness be pretended, that God is absolutely obliged to give this advantage to any, or that, if he gives it to any, he is obliged to give it equally to all men, since it is manifest in fact that in the course of his providence much greater advantages are given to some than to others, with respect to the means of religious and moral improvement; yet it is reasonable to conclude, that he hath not left all mankind at all times entirely destitute of an assistance of such great consequence and so much wanted. This affordeth a strong presumption, that God hath at some time or other made discoveries of his will to mankind in a way of extraordinary revelation, additional to the common light of nature.

It is also manifest, that supposing such a revelation to have been really given from God, and that men have sufficient evidence to convince them that it was from God, those to whom this revelation is made known, are indispensably obliged to receive and embrace it. This every man must acknowledge, who hath just notions of the Deity, or that God is the moral governor of the world, and hath a right to give laws to his creatures, and to require obedience to those laws. And it were the greatest absurdity to suppose, that men may innocently reject what they have good reason to regard as the significations of the divine will, made to them for this purpose, that they should believe and obey them.

These are principles which cannot justly be contested; the grand question then is, whether any sufficient proofs or evidences can be produced, that such a revelation hath been really given, and what

those proofs and evidences are. Some there are who seem not willing to allow that any persons, but those to whom the revelation is immediately made, can have sufficient evidence or proof to satisfy them that it is a true revelation from God. This is what Lord Herbert insisteth upon in his book "*De Veritate*," and in several parts of his other works, where he makes it a necessary condition of a man's having a certain knowledge of a divine revelation, that it be made immediately to himself, and that he should feel a divine afflatus in the reception of it. In this his Lordship has been followed by other writers that have appeared in the same cause. According to this scheme, it is vain for those that have received a revelation from God to offer to produce any proofs of their divine mission, since no proofs or evidences can be offered that will be sufficient, except every one of those to whom they impart this have another particular revelation to assure them of it. This is in effect to pronounce, that supposing God to have communicated to any person or persons extraordinary discoveries of his will, to be by them communicated for the use and instruction of mankind, it is absolutely out of his power to furnish them with such credentials of their divine mission as may make it reasonable for others to receive the doctrines and laws delivered by such persons in his name as of divine authority. But such an assertion cannot be excused from great rashness and arrogance, and is a most unwarrantable limitation of the divine power and wisdom. It will indeed be readily allowed, that supposing persons to declare with ever so great confidence that they are extraordinarily sent of God, we are not to receive their bare word for a proof of it; and though they themselves should be firmly persuaded of the truth and divinity of the revelation made immediately to them, this their persuasion is not a sufficient warrant for others to receive that revelation as true and divine, except some farther proofs and evidences are given. And it is reasonable to believe, that in that case, if God hath sent persons, and extraordinarily inspired them to deliver doctrines and laws of great importance to mankind in his name, he will furnish them with such proofs and evidences as may be a sufficient ground to those to whom this revelation is not immediately made, to receive those doctrines and laws as of divine authority. And here in judging of these, it must be acknowledged, that great care and caution is necessary, since it cannot be denied that there have been false pretences to revelation, the effects of enthusiasm or imposture, which have given rise to impositions that have been of ill consequence to mankind. And though that is not a just reason for rejecting all revelation at once, as false or uncertain, yet it is a very good reason for making a very careful inquiry into the evidences that are produced for any pretended revelation. And with regard to this it may be observed, that where persons pretending to bring a system of doctrines and laws, which they profess to have received by revelation from God, have had their divine mission confirmed by a series of the most extraordinary works, bearing the illustrious characters of a divine interposition, and which they have been enabled to perform in declared attestation of it;

especially, if they have been enabled also to make express predictions in the name of God, concerning things future, which no human sagacity could foresee; and if at the same time the revelation itself appeareth to be of a most excellent tendency, manifestly conducive to the glory of God, and to the good of mankind, and to the promoting the interest of important truth, righteousness, and virtue in the world, and thereby answering the main ends of all religion; there seems in that case to be sufficient evidence to produce a reasonable conviction, that this is a revelation from God, and consequently to justify and demand our receiving and submitting to it as of divine authority. For in this case, there seemeth to be as much evidence given to satisfy an honest and impartial inquirer as could be reasonably expected or desired, supposing a revelation really given. And that this hath actually been the case with regard to the revelation contained in the Holy Scriptures, the advocates for Christianity have set themselves to show, with great force of reason and argument.

With regard to the external attestations given to the truth and divinity of the Scripture-revelation, there is scarcely any thing in which the deistical writers have been more generally agreed than in bending their force against the proof from miracles. The methods they have taken to this purpose have been various: sometimes they have gone so far as to pretend to prove, that miracles are absolutely impossible; at other times that they are needless and useless, and are incapable of showing the divine mission of persons, or truth of doctrines, because there is no connexion between power and truth. But though it will be readily acknowledged, that power and truth are distinct ideas, this does by no means prove, that the former can in no case give attestation to the latter: for if power be exerted in such a way as to manifest an extraordinary divine interposition in favour of a person professing to bring doctrines and laws from God to mankind, and be appealed to for that purpose, in such a case power so exerted may give an attestation to the truth and authority of those doctrines and laws. Some of the deists themselves are so sensible of this, that, after all their pretences, they are obliged to make acknowledgments with regard to the use of miracles that are of no small disservice to their cause. They acknowledge that they may be of use to excite and engage attention to doctrines and laws; which supposes them to carry something in them of the nature of an attestation or proof, since otherwise no more regard ought to be paid to doctrines or laws on the account of miracles, than if they were not attended with miracles at all. The *Moral Philosopher* owns, that "miracles, especially if wrought for the good of mankind, are perhaps the most effectual means of removing prejudices, and procuring attention to what is delivered." Mr. Collins goes so far as to acknowledge, that miracles, when done in proof of doctrines and precepts that are consistent with reason, and for the honour of God and the good of mankind, ought to determine men to believe and receive them; and that Christ's miracles might have been sufficient, if he had not appealed to prophecy, and laid the principal

stress of the proof of his divine mission upon it, as this writer pretends he did.* Mr. Woolston says, "I believe it will be granted on all hands, that the restoring a person indisputably dead to life is a stupendous miracle, and that two or three such miracles, well attested and credibly reported, are enough to conciliate the belief, that the author of them was a divine agent, and invested with the power of God."† And Spinoza is said to have declared, that if he could believe that the resurrection of Lazarus was really wrought as it is related, he would give up his system.

That God can, if he thinketh fit, alter or suspend the course of natural causes in particular instances, must be allowed by all who acknowledge that he is the Lord of nature, and the Sovereign of the universe. And that it may be agreeable to his wisdom to do so on some extraordinary occasions, may appear from this consideration, that such interpositions may be of use to awaken in men a sense of a governing providence, and to convince them that the course of nature is not a fatal series of blind necessary causes, but under the regulation of a most wise and free, as well as powerful mind; which, as it hath very properly appointed that things should ordinarily go on in an uniform course according to established laws, so it can alter or over-rule, interrupt or suspend, the effect and influence of natural causes, and deviate from the usual course of things on special occasions for valuable purposes: and such a valuable purpose it would be for providence to interpose for giving an illustrious attestation to doctrines and laws of great importance to mankind, and to the divine mission of persons sent to instruct them in religion, to recover them from great errors and corruptions, and guide them to a true knowledge, obedience, and adoration of the deity, and to a holy and virtuous practice. Extraordinary miraculous interpositions in such a case would answer an excellent end, and be worthy of the divine wisdom and goodness. This seems to be a way of God's giving his testimony the most powerful and striking that can be, and which is peculiarly fitted for engaging mankind to receive and submit to such a revelation as of divine authority. And thus it was with regard to the miracles wrought at the first establishment of the Jewish and Christian dispensations. There was not merely a single extraordinary event or two, in which case it might have been supposed that it was only some strange thing that had happened, of which no account can be given, and from which nothing certain can be concluded; but there was a marvellous succession and concurrence of the most extraordinary facts, done in the most open public manner, in a great number of instances, and for a series of years together, all visibly tending to the same important end, viz. to give attestation to the divine authority of a system of doctrines and laws delivered in the name of God himself. And these facts were of such a nature, so manifestly transcending all human power, and which bore such evident marks of divine interposition, that,

* Scheme of Literal Prophecy, p. 321, 322.

† Fifth Discourse on Miracles, p. 3.

taken together, they form as strong an evidence as could be reasonably expected and desired. And I believe few, if any, can be found, who are really persuaded of the truth of those facts, and do not also acknowledge the divine original and authority of the revelation thus attested and confirmed. And supposing such miraculous attestations to have been really given, at the first promulgation and establishment of a system of doctrines and laws, which is declared to have come from God; this is sufficient to establish its authority, not only at that time, but to succeeding ages, provided that the accounts of those doctrines and laws, and of the extraordinary facts whereby they were attested, were faithfully transmitted, in a manner which may be safely depended upon. And that this has been the case with regard to the Mosaic and Christian revelation, hath been often clearly shown.

With regard to the former, never were there in the world facts of a more public nature, than those by which the Mosaical law was attested. They were not merely things done in a way of secret intercourse and communication with the Deity, in which case there might have been some suspicion of imposture, but they were facts done openly in the view of all the people, who, let us suppose them ever so stupid, could not possibly have been made to believe that all these things happened in their own sight, and that they themselves had been witnesses to them, if they had not been so. Nor can it be supposed that Moses, who was certainly a wise man, would have attempted so wild a thing as to have appealed to the people, as he does all along, for the truth of those facts, and to have put the authority of his laws upon them, if at the same time they all knew them to be false. If therefore Moses published those facts himself to all the people, the facts were true. And that he did himself publish those facts, we have the same proof which we have that he gave the laws. And that he gave the laws to the people of Israel, as the whole nation who were governed by those laws have constantly affirmed, no reasonable man can deny. The accounts of the facts are so interwoven with the very body of the laws, that they cannot be separated. Some of the principal motives to engage the people to the observance of those laws are taken from those facts. Many of the laws were peculiarly designed to preserve the remembrance of those facts. And this was the professed end of the institution of some of their most solemn sacred rites, which were to be constantly observed by the whole nation, in every age from the beginning of their policy. These laws and facts were not transmitted merely by oral tradition, which in many cases is a very uncertain conveyance, but were immediately committed to writing. And those writings were not kept secret, in the hands of a few, but, from the time they were first written, were published to the people, who were commanded in the name of God to acquaint themselves with those laws and facts, and to teach them diligently to their children, and were assured that, upon their preserving and keeping them, their prosperity and happiness, public and private, and all their privileges, depended. Accordingly, in all the remaining writ-

ings of that nation, whether of an historical, moral, or devotional kind, there is a constant reference not only to the laws, as having been originally given by Moses in the name of God to their nation, but to the wonderful facts that were done in attestation to those laws, as of undoubted credit, and as things universally known and acknowledged among them. If those facts had been only mentioned in a few passages, it might possibly be pretended, that the accounts of them were interpolations, afterwards inserted in these writings. But as the case is circumstanced, there is no room for this pretence. The facts are repeated and referred to on so many different occasions, that it appears with the utmost evidence, that those facts have been all along known and acknowledged, and the remembrance of them constantly kept up among that people in all ages. Their peculiar constitution, whereby they were so remarkably distinguished from all other nations, was plainly founded upon the truth and authority of those facts, nor could have been established without them.

To all which it may be added, that the very quality of the writings which contain an account of those facts, or in which they are referred to as of undoubted truth, derives no small credit to them. A profound veneration for the Deity every where appears, together with a remarkable unaffected simplicity and integrity, and an impartial love of truth. It cannot reasonably be pretended, that they were forged to humour and flatter their nation; for with the utmost freedom they relate things greatly to the disadvantage of their national character. They represent, impartially and without disguise, their frequent defections from their law, their disobedience and ingratitude to God for all his benefits, and the great punishments inflicted upon them on that account. Besides which it is to be observed, that there are in those writings clear and express predictions of future extraordinary events, which no human sagacity could foresee, and which yet have been most remarkably accomplished. And particularly it is there most expressly foretold, that the people of Israel, for whom God had done such great things, should yet be distinguished with judgments and calamities above all other nations; that they should be dispersed all over the face of the earth, exposed to universal obloquy, and yet not be utterly lost or destroyed, but still preserved as a distinct people; which we see most signally verified at this day: a thing so wonderful, taken in all its circumstances, that this people may be regarded as a living continued monument of the truth of their own ancient sacred writings, and of the extraordinary facts there recorded.

As to the extraordinary and miraculous facts whereby the divine original and authority of the Christian revelation was attested and confirmed, never were there any facts that had clearer and more convincing evidence attending them. They were many in number, done for the most part in the most public manner, and for a series of years together, and produced the most wonderful effects, in bringing over vast numbers both of Jews and Gentiles, in the very age in which the facts were done, and when they had the best opportunity of knowing the truth of those facts, to receive a cruci-

fied Jesus as their Saviour and their Lord, than which nothing could be imagined more contrary to the prejudices which then universally obtained. The accounts of these facts, as well as of the pure and excellent laws and doctrines in attestation of which they were wrought, were published in the very age in which these laws were delivered, and those facts were done, and by persons who were perfectly acquainted with the things they relate. And the facts themselves were of such a nature, that they could not be deceived in them themselves, supposing they had their senses. Nor had they any temptation or interest to put them upon endeavouring to impose upon others, by giving false accounts of those facts. For, besides that the falsehood of those accounts must, as the case was circumstanced, have been immediately detected and exposed, the religion which was confirmed by those facts was in many things directly contrary to those notions and prejudices with which their own minds had been most strongly prepossessed, and which nothing less than the undeniable evidence they had of those facts was able to overcome. And it strengthens this when it is considered, that this religion, instead of promising them any worldly advantages, exposed them to the most cruel reproaches, persecutions, and sufferings, and to whatever is most grievous to human nature ; which they endured with an amazing constancy, persisting in their testimony, even to death. To which it may be added, that if we examine the writings themselves, we shall find in them all the characters of genuine purity, integrity, undisguised simplicity, and an impartial regard to truth, that any writings can possibly have. And the whole scheme of religion there laid down is uniformly directed to the glory of God, and the good of mankind, and to serve the cause of virtue and righteousness in the world. Accordingly, these writings were immediately received with great veneration in the very age in which they were first written and published, and from that time regarded as of undoubted truth and of divine authority. They were soon spread far and wide, read in the public religious assemblies of Christians, translated into various languages, and they have been constantly cited by great numbers of writers in every age since, whose works are still extant, many of whom have not only quoted particular passages, but have transcribed large portions of them into their writings, by which it incontestably appears, that they were the same, both with regard to the accounts of doctrines and facts, that are now in our hands. They have been on numberless occasions appealed to by persons of different sects, parties, and opinions in religion ; so that it would not have been in the power of any party of men, if they had been so disposed, to have destroyed or corrupted all the copies, or to have made a general alteration in the scheme of religion there taught, or in the accounts of the facts there recorded. And it is evident, in fact, that no such alterations have been made, since religion there appeareth in its primitive simplicity, as it was in the first age of the Christian church, without any of the corruptions of latter ages. And, upon the whole, it may upon good grounds be affirmed, that the proofs

which are brought to shew that the Scriptures are safely transmitted to us are greater than can be produced for any other books in the world. This hath been often fully vindicated, and set in so clear a light, that the enemies of Christianity have had no other way of avoiding the evidence, but by most absurdly flying out (as hath been observed before) into invectives against all historical evidence, and against the credit of all past facts whatsoever. It may, therefore, be justly said, that no greater evidence of the truth of the extraordinary facts whereby Christianity was attested, can reasonably be desired, except all these stupendous facts were to be done over again for our conviction. And if one man thinks he may justly demand this, another man hath an equal right to demand it, and so every man may demand it. And those facts must be repeated in every age, in every nation, and in the sight of every single person, which would be the most absurd and unreasonable thing in the world, and the most unworthy of the divine wisdom.

This may suffice with regard to the extraordinary attestations given to the revelation contained in the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testament, and which exhibit illustrious convincing proofs of its divine original. It will be proper next to consider the nature and excellence of the revelation itself, with the scheme of religion there delivered to us; and, it will appear, upon the most impartial examination, to be worthy of God, of a most admirable tendency, and well fitted to answer the important ends for which we might suppose a revelation to have been given to mankind.

That we may have a juster notion of the religion held forth to us in the Holy Scriptures, it is proper to take a brief view of it from the beginning. The sacred volume opens with that which lies at the foundation of religion, an account of God's having created the world, which is there described in a plain and familiar manner, accommodated to the capacities of the people, and with a noble simplicity; as is also the original formation of man, who is represented as having been formed after the divine image, invested with a dominion over the inferior creation, with a reservation of the homage he himself owed to God as his sovereign Lord, and constituted in a paradisaical state, a happy state of purity and innocence. There is nothing in this but what is agreeable to right reason, as well as to the most ancient traditions that have obtained among the nations. We are farther there informed, that man fell from that state by sinning against his Maker; and that sin brought death into the world, and all the evils and miseries to which the human race is now obnoxious: but that the merciful Parent of our being, in his great goodness and compassion, was pleased to make such revelations and discoveries of his grace and mercy, as laid a proper foundation for the faith and hope of his offending creatures, and for the exercise of religion towards him. Accordingly, the religion delivered in the Scripture is the religion of man in his lapsed state; and any one that impartially and carefully considers it, will find one scheme of religion, substantially the same, carried all along through

the whole, till it was brought to its full perfection and accomplishment by Jesus Christ.

This religion may be considered principally under three periods. The first is the religion of the patriarchal times, which consisted in the pure adoration of the Deity, free from idolatry, in a firm belief of his universal and particular providence, a hope of his pardoning mercy towards penitent sinners, and a confiding in him as the great rewarder of them that diligently seek him: which reward they looked for, not merely in this present world, but in a future state: for we are told, that they *sought a better country, that is an heavenly*. These were the main principles of their religion, together with a strong sense of their obligation to the practice of piety, virtue, and universal righteousness. To which it may be added, that there seems to have been a hope and expectation from the beginning, originally founded on a divine promise, of a great Saviour, who was to redeem mankind from the miseries and ruin to which they were exposed, and through whom God was to make the fullest discoveries and exhibitions of his grace and mercy towards the human race, and to raise them to a high degree of glory and felicity. As to the external rites of religion then made use of, the most ancient rite of which we have any account, is that of offering sacrifice to God: and its having so early and universally obtained among all nations, and in the most ancient times, as a sacred rite of religion, can scarcely be otherwise accounted for, than by supposing it to have been a part of the primitive religion, originally enjoined by divine appointment to the first ancestors of the human race, and from them transmitted to their descendants. This patriarchal religion, as it has been described, seems to have been the religion of Adam after his fall, of Abel, Seth, Enoch, and the antediluvian patriarchs; and afterwards of Noah, the second parent of mankind, and of the several heads of families derived from him, who probably carried it into their several dispersions. But, above all, this religion was signally exemplified in Abraham, who was illustrious for his faith, piety, and righteousness, and whom God was pleased to favour with special discoveries of his will. From him descended many great nations, among whom this religion, in its main principles, seems to have been preserved, of which there are noble remains in the book of Job. There were also remarkable vestiges of it for a long time preserved among several other nations; and, indeed, the belief of one supreme God, of a providence, a hope of pardoning mercy, a sense of the obligations of piety and virtue, and of the acceptance and reward of sincere obedience, and the expectation of a future state, were never entirely extinguished. And whosoever among the Gentiles at any time, or in any nation, was a fearer of God, and a worker of righteousness, might be justly regarded as of the ancient patriarchal religion, and was favourably accepted with God. But in process of time, the nations became generally depraved, sunk into a deplorable darkness and corruption, and the great principles of religion were in a great measure covered and overwhelmed with

an amazing load of superstitions, idolatries, and corruptions of all kinds.

The second view of religion, as set before us in the Scriptures, is, that which relates to the Mosaical dispensation. This was really and essentially the same religion, for substance, which was professed and practised in the ancient patriarchal times, with the addition of a special covenant made with a particular people, among whom God was pleased, for wise ends, to erect a sacred polity, and to whom he gave a revelation of his will, which was committed to writing as the safest conveyance; whereas religion had been hitherto preserved chiefly by tradition, which was more easily maintained during the long lives of men in the first ages. The special covenant was no ways inconsistent with God's universal providence and goodness towards mankind; nor did it in any degree vacate or infringe the ancient primitive religion which had obtained from the beginning, but was designed to be subservient to the great ends of it, and to preserve it from being utterly depraved and extinguished. The principal end of that polity, and the main view to which it was all directed, was to restore and preserve the true worship and adoration of the one living and true God, and of him only, in opposition to that polytheism and idolatry which began then to spread generally through the nations; and to engage those to whom it was made known, to the practice of piety, virtue, and righteousness, by giving them holy and excellent laws, expressly prescribing the particulars of their duty, and enforced by the sanctions of a divine authority, and by promises and threatenings in the name of God. And also to keep up the hope and expectation of the Redeemer, who had been promised from the beginning, and to prepare men for that most perfect and complete dispensation of religion, which he was to introduce. And whosoever impartially examines that constitution must be obliged to acknowledge, that it was admirably fitted to answer these important ends. The laws of Moses, and the sacred writings of the Old Testament, teach us to form the justest and noblest notions of God, as having created all things by his power, as preserving and governing all things by his providence, as possessed of all possible perfections; infinitely powerful, wise, and good, holy, just, and true, a lover of righteousness, a hater of sin and wickedness; omnipresent, omniscient; to whom we owe the highest love, the profoundest reverence, the most absolute submission and resignation, and the most steady dependence. There is a strain of unequalled piety every where running through those sacred writings. We are there taught to refer all to God, to do every thing we do as in his presence, and in a subordination to his glory. We have there also excellent precepts given us with regard to the duties we owe to our fellow-creatures. All social duties may be regarded as comprehended in that admirable precept of the law, *Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself*. A just, a kind, and benevolent conduct is prescribed, and not only are all injurious actions forbidden in the strongest manner, but even all inordinate desires and covetings after what belongeth to others, which lie at the foun-

dation of all the injustice men are guilty of towards their neighbours. The ten commandments, which contain a comprehensive summary of the moral precepts, were, that they might make the greater impression, delivered with the greatest majesty and solemnity that can be conceived. There was indeed a variety of ritual injunctions prescribed under that constitution, the reasons of all which cannot be clearly assigned at this distance. But some of them were manifestly intended in opposition to the rites of the neighbouring nations, and with a view to preserve them as a distinct people, and keep them free from the infections of their idolatries. Others of their rites were instituted to keep up the memorials of the signal and extraordinary acts of divine providence towards them, especially those by which their law had been confirmed and established. And some of them seem to have been originally designed as types and prefigurations of good things to come, under that more perfect dispensation which was to succeed. The rite of sacrificing, which had been in use from the most ancient times, and began to be greatly perverted and abused among the nations, was brought under distinct regulations, and only to be performed to the honour of the one true God, the great Creator and Lord of the universe. Polytheism and the worship of inferior deities were forbidden; no obscene or filthy rites, no unnatural rigours or austerities, no human sacrifices or cruel oblations, made a part of their religion, as among many other nations. And the absolute necessity of virtue and righteousness, in order to their acceptance with God, was strongly inculcated, and on this they were directed to lay the principal stress, and not merely on external rites or forms. This constitution is represented as having been introduced and established with the most amazing demonstrations and displays of God's supreme dominion and glorious majesty, and with a visible triumph over idolatry in its proper seat (for so Egypt and Canaan may be looked upon to have been), and with the most awful manifestations of God's just displeasure against those abominable vices as well as idolatries, which were then making a great progress in the world, and of which the Canaanites were remarkably guilty.

What is especially observable is, that under that constitution there was a succession of prophets, who were sent to reclaim the people from the idolatries and corruptions into which they had fallen, and to enforce upon them the practice of real religion and righteousness. Their writings every where abound with the sublimest descriptions and representations of the Deity; they discover a pure and ardent zeal for the glory of God, a noble impartial detestation against vice and wickedness, and a deep and earnest concern for promoting the interests of substantial piety and virtue, and taking men off from a too great dependence on outward forms and ritual observances. And what is peculiarly remarkable, they contain the most illustrious predictions of future events, many of them clear, express, and circumstantial, relating to nations, both of their own and others, and to particular persons. Some of which events

were to take place in their own times, or soon after, and were most remarkably fulfilled; and others were removed to the distance of several ages from the time in which those prophets lived and uttered their predictions, and though absolutely beyond the reach of any human sagacity to foresee, have also received their accomplishment. This shews that they were extraordinarily inspired by Him who alone can foretel future contingencies; and their prophecies gave a farther proof and attestation to the divine original of the Mosaic constitution, since they were designed to engage the people to the observance of the excellent laws that had been given them; and they were also intended to prepare them for expecting a more glorious dispensation, to be brought by a person of unparalleled dignity, whose coming they foretold, and whom they described by the most remarkable characters. Some of these prophets described him by one part of his office and undertaking, and some by another. They pointed to the tribe and family from which he was to spring, the time of his appearance, the place of his birth, the miracles he should perform, the exemplary holiness of his life, his great wisdom and excellence as a teacher; they spoke in the highest terms of his divine dignity, and yet foretold that he was to undergo the most grievous humiliations and bitter sufferings for the sins of men: they testified not only his sufferings, but the glories that should follow; his wonderful exaltation, and the kingdom of righteousness and truth which he was to erect and establish; that the Jews would generally reject him, and that the Gentiles should receive his law, and be sharers of the benefits of his kingdom.

Accordingly the third period relates to that dispensation of religion which was brought by that glorious and divine person whom the prophets had foretold. This is properly the Christian dispensation, which was designed and fitted for an universal extent, and in which, considered in its original purity, religion is brought to its highest perfection and noblest improvement. An admirable wisdom, goodness, and purity, shone forth in the whole conduct and character of the great author of it. He came in the fulness of time, the time which had been pointed out in the prophetic writings. In him the several predictions relating to the extraordinary person that was to come were fulfilled, and the several characters by which he was described were wonderfully united, and in no other. He appeared, as was foretold concerning him, mean in his outward condition and circumstances, and yet maintained in his whole conduct a dignity becoming his divine character. Many of his miracles were of such a kind, and performed in such a manner, as seemed to argue a dominion over nature, and its established laws, and they were acts of great goodness as well as power. He went about doing good to the bodies and to the souls of men; and the admirable instructions he gave were delivered with a divine authority, and yet with great familiarity and condescension. And his own practice was every way suited to the excellence of his precepts. He exhibited the most finished pattern of universal holiness, of love to God, of zeal for the divine glory, of the most wonderful charity and benevolence towards

mankind, of the most unparalleled self-denial, of the most heavenly mind and life, of meekness and patience, humility and condescension. Never was there so perfect a character, so god-like, venerable, and amiable, so remote from that of an enthusiast or an impostor. He himself most expressly foretold his own sufferings, the cruel and ignominious death he was to undergo, his resurrection from the dead on the third day, his ascension into heaven, the dreadful judgments and calamities that should be inflicted on the Jewish nation, and what seemed the most improbable thing in the world, the wonderful progress of his own gospel from the smallest beginnings, notwithstanding the persecutions and difficulties he foretold it should meet with. All this was most exactly fulfilled; he rose again on the third day, and showed himself alive to his disciples after his passion by many infallible proofs, when their hopes were so sunk, that they could hardly believe that he was risen, till they could no longer doubt of it, without renouncing the testimony of all their senses. He gave them commission to go and preach his gospel to all nations; and promised that, to enable them to do it with success, they should be endued with the most extraordinary powers and gifts of the Holy Ghost. This accordingly they did, and though destitute of all worldly advantages, without power, riches, interest, policy, learning, or eloquence, they went through the world, preaching up a crucified Jesus, as the Saviour and Lord of men, and teaching the things which he had commanded them; and by the wonderful powers which they were invested with, and the evidences they produced of their divine mission, they prevailed, and spread the religion of Jesus, as their great Master had foretold, in the midst of sufferings and persecutions, and in opposition to the reigning inveterate prejudices both of Jews and Gentiles.

If we examine the nature and tendency of the religion itself, which was taught by Christ, and by the apostles in his name, we shall find it to be worthy of God. It retaineth all the excellencies of the Old Testament revelation; for our Saviour came not to destroy the law and the prophets, but to fulfil them, and carry the scheme of religion there laid down to a still higher degree of excellence. The idea given us of God, of his incomparable perfections, and his governing providence, as extending to all his creatures, particularly towards mankind, is the noblest that can be conceived, and the most proper to produce worthy affections and dispositions towards him. Great care is especially taken to instruct us to form just notions of God's illustrious moral excellencies, of his wisdom, his faithfulness, and truth, his impartial justice, and righteousness, and spotless purity; but, above all, of his goodness and love to mankind, of which the gospel contains and exhibits the most glorious and attractive discoveries and displays that were ever made to the world. The exceeding riches of the divine grace and mercy are represented in the most engaging manner. Pardon and salvation are freely offered upon the most gracious terms; the very chief of sinners are invited, and the strongest possible assurances given of God's readiness to receive them, upon their sincere repentance and

reformation; and at the same time, to prevent an abuse of this, the most striking representations are made of God's just wrath and displeasure against those that obstinately go on in presumptuous sin and disobedience. It is especially the glory of the gospel, that the great realities of an unseen eternal world are there set in the most clear and open light; there are clearer discoveries made, and far stronger assurances given, of that future life and immortality, than were ever given to mankind before.

As to the precepts of Christianity, they are unquestionably holy and excellent. The purest morality is taught in all its just and noble extent, as taking in the whole of our duty towards God, our neighbours, and ourselves.

As to piety towards God, the idea there given of it is venerable, amiable, and engaging; we are required to fear God, but it is not with a servile horror, such as superstition inspires, but with a filial reverence. We are directed and encouraged to address ourselves to him as our heavenly Father, through Jesus Christ, the Son of his love, and in his name to offer up our prayers and praises, our confessions and thanksgivings, with the profoundest humility, becoming creatures deeply sensible of their own unworthiness, and yet with an ingenuous affiance, hope, and joy. We are to yield the most unreserved submission to God as our sovereign Lord, our most wise and righteous Governor, and most gracious Benefactor; to resign ourselves to his disposal, and acquiesce in his providential dispensations, as being persuaded that he ordereth all things really for the best; to walk continually as in his sight, and with a regard to his approbation, setting him before us as our great all-seeing witness and judge, our chiefest good and highest end. Above all we are required to love the Lord our God with all our heart, and mind, and strength, and to show that we love him, by keeping his commandments, by aspiring after a conformity to him in his imitable perfections, and by endeavouring, as far as we are able, to glorify him in the world. As to the external worship of God, according to the idea given of it in the New Testament, it is pure and spiritual, and hath a noble simplicity in it. The numerous rites of the Mosaical dispensation, which, though wisely suited to that time and state, were marks of the imperfection of that economy, are now abolished. The ordinances of Christianity, as prescribed in the gospel, are few in number, easy of observance, and noble in their use and significance.

Not only doth Christianity give the most excellent directions as to the duty we more immediately owe to God, but a mighty stress is there laid upon social duties and social virtues, which it hath a manifest tendency to promote and improve. The constant exercise of justice, and righteousness, and fidelity, is most expressly enjoined: the rendering to all their dues, and a diligent discharge of the duties of our several stations and relations, is bound upon us, not merely by civil considerations, but as a necessary part of religion. But what ought especially to recommend Christianity is, that a true and extensive benevolence is there carried to the noblest heights; it

strengthens the natural ties of humanity, and adds other sacred and most engaging ties to bind us still more strongly to another. We are taught to love our neighbours as ourselves, to rejoice in their happiness, and endeavour to promote it, to do good to all as far as we have opportunity; yea, even to extend our benevolence to our enemies themselves, and to those that have injured us; and to be ready to render good for evil, and overcome evil with good. It tends to discountenance and suppress that malice and envy, hatred and revenge, those boisterous angry passions, and malevolent affections and dispositions, which have done so much mischief in the world.

As to the exercise of self-government, Christianity is manifestly designed to improve and perfect human nature. It teaches us not only to regulate the outward actions, but the inward affections and dispositions of the soul; to labour after real purity of heart, simplicity and godly sincerity, as that without which no outward appearances can be pleasing in the sight of God. It strikes at the root of all our disorders and corruptions, by obliging us to correct and regulate that inordinate self-love, which causeth us to centre all our views in ourselves, in our own pleasure, or glory, or interest, and by instructing us to mortify and subdue our sensual appetites and inclinations. It is designed to assert the dominion of the rational and moral powers over the inferior part of our nature, of the spirit over the flesh, which alone can lay a just foundation for that moral liberty, and that tranquillity of mind, which it is the design of all true philosophy to procure and establish. And whereas a too great love of the world, and its enjoyments, its riches, honours, or pleasures, is the source of numberless disorders in human life, and turns us astray in our whole course, it teacheth us to rectify our false opinions of these things, and not to seek happiness in them, but to set our affections principally on things of a far higher and nobler nature, things celestial and eternal. And with regard to the evils of this present life and world, it tendeth to inspire us with the noblest fortitude, and to render us superior to those evils, as being persuaded that God will cause them to work together for our good, and will over-rule them to our greater happiness. It provideth the best remedy both against our cares and fears, especially against the fear of death itself.

All that are acquainted with the New Testament know, that this is a true though imperfect representation of the nature and tendency of the religion of Jesus; nor need I point to the particular passages that prove it. Indeed the excellence of the morals there prescribed is so evident, that the enemies of Christianity have been obliged to pretend that its precepts are carried to a too great degree of strictness, impracticable to human nature in its present state. But not to urge, that the rule set before us ought to be perfect, and that though perhaps none of us can in every instance fully come up to it, yet it tendeth to inspire a laudable ambition, and to put us upon a constant endeavour of going on towards perfection, that we may approach still nearer to the prescribed pattern of excellence; not to urge this, it deserveth special observation, that though morality is

carried by our Saviour both in his precepts and example to the height of purity and excellence, yet it is not, under pretence of extraordinary refinement, carried to unwarrantable extremes. It is not required of us to extinguish the passions, as the Stoics pretended to do, but to govern and moderate them, and keep them within proper bounds. Christianity doth not prescribe an unfeeling apathy, or pretend to render us insensible to the evils of this present life: but directeth us to bear up under them with patience and constancy, supported by the considerations of reason and religion, and encouraged by the glorious prospects that are before us. We are taught to deny ourselves; but the intention is only that we should subject our inferior appetites to the noble part of our natures, and that the pleasures and interests of the flesh and the world should be made to give way to interests of a higher nature, to the duty we owe to God, and to the love of truth, virtue, and righteousness, whenever they happen to come into competition. We are required not to make provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof; but we are not urged to macerate our bodies with excessive rigours and austerities, or to chastise them with bloody discipline. We are to be heavenly-minded, and to set our affections upon the things which are above; but so as not to neglect the duties, businesses, and offices of human life; an attendance to which is expressly required of us in the gospel law. We are not commanded absolutely to quit the world; but, which is a much nobler attainment, to live above the world, whilst we are in it, and to keep ourselves free from its pollutions; not wholly to renounce our present enjoyments, but to be moderate in the use of them, and so to use this world as not to abuse it. All drunkenness and gluttony and excesses of riot are forbidden, and we are required to exercise a regular sobriety and temperance in our food; but we are not commanded to abstain from divers kinds of meats, and are taught that every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving, for it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer. It is required of us, that we may be chaste and pure, keeping our vessels clean in sanctification and honour, and not in the lusts of concupiscence; and yet an undue stress is not laid upon virginity or celibacy, as was too much done in after ages, but marriage is declared to be "honourable in all, and the bed undefiled." Polygamy, which was formerly in some measure tolerated, is no longer so under the perfect institution of our Saviour. And the gospel precepts in this respect, though exclaimed against as harsh and severe, are really most agreeable to the original intention of marriage, and the balance maintained by providence between the sexes. The Christian people are directed to pay a due reverence to their pastors, and to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake; but they are not commanded to yield a blind submission to them; and their pastors are forbidden to act as *lords over God's heritage*, or as having dominion over their faith, but as *helpers of their joy*. And finally it is evident, that in the whole scheme of the Christian religion, as taught by Christ and his Apostles, there is not the least trace to be found of worldly

ambition, avarice, or sensuality. Virtue is there placed on the best and most solid foundations; our duties are urged upon us in their proper order, they are traced from their true source, and directed to their proper end. We are taught to aspire continually to higher degrees of holiness and virtue, and not to take up with a meaner felicity than that which ariseth from a perfect conformity to God himself, and the eternal enjoyment of him. In one word, Christian morality, or the duty required of us, is summed up by our great heavenly teacher, in love, love to God, and charity towards mankind, accompanied with real purity of heart and life. And all this is to be attended with an amiable humility. We must abound in good works, but not glory in them; when we have done our best, and aspired to the noblest attainments that we are capable of in this present state, all vain-glorious boasting, all confidence in our own righteousness or merits, is excluded. On God and his grace we must place our dependence, and to this ascribe the glory.

What a lovely idea is here set before us of moral excellence! And as the gospel precepts are so pure, prescribing our duty in its proper extent, so the strength and power of the motives there proposed, if duly attended to, will be found answerable to the purity of the precepts. And in this all the moral systems that natural religion or philosophy can furnish, are very deficient. Our duty is bound upon us in the holy Scripture, by the express authority and command of God himself, which must needs give a mighty weight to the precepts and directions there prescribed. All the charms of the divine goodness, grace, and love, are represented to our view, to lead us to repentance and holy obedience. The most perfect models are set before us: God himself is exhibited to our imitation, as the great original of moral goodness and excellence; and the example of his well-beloved Son, who was the living image of his own love, goodness, and purity here below. Good men are honoured with the most glorious characters, and are invested with the most valuable privileges, that they may be excited and engaged to walk worthy of those characters and privileges, and of the *high calling wherewith they are called*. And for our greater encouragement, the most express assurances are given us of God's readiness to communicate the gracious influences of his Holy Spirit; not to render our own endeavours needless, but to assist and animate our sincere endeavours. The important solemnities of a future judgment are displayed before us in the most striking manner, when every man must give an account of himself to God, and must receive according to the things done in his body, whether good or evil. Nothing can possibly be more noble and more engaging than the idea that is there given us of a glorious resurrection, and of that eternal life which is prepared for good men in the heavenly world, which is represented to us not merely as a paradise of sensual delights, but as a pure and sublime felicity, fitted to animate the most virtuous and excellent minds. And on the other hand, the punishments that shall be inflicted on the obstinately impenitent and disobedient, are represented in such a manner as is most proper to awaken and deter

presumptuous sinners, who will not be wrought upon by the beauty and excellence of virtue, and the charms of divine love and goodness.

Any man that impartially considers these things, if he be really and in good earnest a friend to virtue and to mankind, would be apt to wish the Christian revelation true, and to acknowledge the great advantage of it where it is heartily believed and embraced. For, must it not be a mighty advantage to have the great principles of religion, which are of such vast importance to our happiness, confirmed by the testimony of God himself?—to have our duty urged upon us in his name, and plainly set before us in express precepts, which must needs come with a far superior force, considered as enjoined by a divine authority, than as the dictates of philosophers or moralists?—to have the most explicit declarations made to us in the name of God himself, concerning the terms upon which forgiveness is to be obtained, and concerning the extent of that forgiveness, with respect to which many anxious jealousies and fears might otherwise be apt to arise in our hearts? And finally, to be assured by express revelation from God, of the nature, greatness, and eternal duration of that reward, with which he will crown our sincere though imperfect obedience: a reward far transcending not only our deserts, but even all that we could expect, or were able to conceive!

And now, upon reviewing this scheme of religion, which is undoubtedly the scheme of Christianity, as set before us in the New Testament, it is a reflection that naturally offereth itself, that, supposing God had thought fit to make an extraordinary revelation of his will to mankind, it can scarcely be conceived that it could be fuller of goodness and purity, that it could contain more excellent precepts, or set before us a more perfect model and example, or be enforced by more powerful motives, or be directed to nobler ends. Could such a scheme of religion as hath been mentioned, be the product either of imposture or enthusiasm? Its whole nature, design, and tendency, manifestly show, that it could not be the work of impostors; especially of impostors so wicked, as to forge a series of the most extraordinary facts; not merely a single imposture, but a chain of impostures, and solemnly attest them in the name of God himself, when they themselves knew them to be absolutely false. There is nothing in the whole contexture of this religion that savours of private selfish interests, or carnal views, or worldly policy. And is it consistent with the character of impostors, without any regard to their own worldly advantage, to expose themselves to all manner of sufferings, reproaches, and persecutions, and even to death itself, for publishing a scheme of pure religion, piety, and righteousness, merely from a desire of promoting the glory of God, and the good of mankind? To which may be added, that the persons who, we know, first published this religion to the world, were absolutely incapable of inventing such an admirable scheme of religion as Christianity is. If they could have entertained a design of putting a religion of their

own invention upon the world, it must have been, considering their notions and prejudices, very different in many things from that which is taught in the New Testament. Nor could they have had it in their power, if they had been willing, to have imposed such a series of facts in that age, many of them represented to be of a very public nature, if they had been false. And it is equally absurd to suppose this religion to have been the product of enthusiasm, as of imposture. Could enthusiasts produce such a beautiful and regular scheme, so consistent in all its parts, exhibiting such just and noble ideas of God and of religion, such a perfect rule of duty, in which moral excellence is raised to the highest degree of purity, without running to extremes, and is enforced by such engaging motives, so admirably fitted to the excellence of the precepts? Surely this, which is so vastly superior to any scheme of religion or morals taught by the most wise and learned philosophers and moralists, could not be the work of enthusiasts, especially of such frantic enthusiasts as they must have been, if they really believed that the wonderful facts recorded in the gospels were done before their eyes, and that they themselves were endued with such extraordinary gifts of the Holy Ghost, and performed the most stupendous miracles, when there was no such thing. And since the gospel scheme of religion was neither the product of enthusiasm nor of imposture, it was not of human invention; and as it cannot be supposed to have had its rise from evil beings, superior to man, who would never lend their assistance to enforce and establish such an excellent scheme of religion, virtue, and righteousness, it followeth that the account given by the first publishers of it was true, and that they received it, as they themselves declared, by revelation from God himself.

Upon the whole, taking all these things together, there seems to be as much evidence of the truth and divinity of the Scripture revelation, as could be reasonably expected and desired, supposing a revelation really given. For on the one hand, it hath the most excellent internal characters of truth and goodness in its nature and tendency, whereby it appeareth to be worthy of God, pure, holy, and heavenly, admirably calculated to promote the glory of God, and the good of mankind, and the cause of righteousness and virtue in the world, and to prepare men by a life of holy obedience on earth for the eternal enjoyment of God in heaven. On the other hand, it was accompanied with the most illustrious external attestations, such as carried the manifest proofs of a divine interposition, and which it cannot reasonably be supposed God would ever give, or permit to be given, to an imposture.

As to the Christian scheme of a Mediator, the prejudices which some have been apt to entertain against Christianity on that account, seem principally to have arisen from misapprehensions or misrepresentations of that doctrine. It has been represented, as if the notion of a mediator between God and man, supposed the supreme Being, the Father of the universe, to be in himself implacable and inexorable, and to have had no thoughts of mercy or pity towards

sinners of the human race, till he was prevailed upon, contrary to his own inclinations, by the solicitations of a powerful Mediator. But this is not the idea of the Mediator given us in the holy Scriptures. On the contrary, the very appointment of the Mediator is there represented as wholly owing to the free and sovereign grace and goodness of God, the Father of all, who being full of love and compassion, and determined to show mercy towards his guilty creatures, fixed upon this way of doing it, by sending his own Son into the world to recover them from their guilt, corruption, and misery, to holiness and happiness.

In what method it may please God to transact with guilty creatures, who have offended him by their transgressions and disobedience, and to dispense his acts of grace and favour towards them, we cannot take upon us certainly to determine, except he should please to reveal it. This dependeth upon what seemeth most becoming his own glorious majesty, and most meet to his infinite wisdom, for answering the great ends and reasons of his government; of which we cannot pretend, if left to ourselves, to be competent judges. But the making use of a Mediator in the way the gospel informeth us, through whom his benefits are conferred upon us, and in whose name our prayers and services are offered to his acceptance, seemeth to be admirably fitted for preserving the dignity of his supreme authority and government, and an awful sense and veneration of his infinite majesty and greatness, his righteousness and purity, in the minds of his creatures, together with an humbling sense and conviction of their own guilt and unworthiness, and the great evil of their sins and transgressions; and at the same time it greatly contributeth to dispel their guilty jealousies and fears, and to inspire them with ingenuous affiance in his grace and mercy, and a hope of his gracious acceptance.

Some notion of the propriety of a Mediator, through whom we have access to God, and his benefits are communicated to us, hath very generally obtained among mankind, which probably might have its rise in a tradition derived from the earliest ages. But this, like other principles of that most ancient primitive religion, became very much corrupted among the nations, who worshipped a great number of idol gods and idol mediators. Under the Jewish economy, the great Mediator was typified and prefigured, both by Moses, who was appointed to transact between God and the people, and especially in the office of the high-priest, and the solemnities of the service he was to perform on their behalf on the great day of expiation. And there was also preserved amongst them, a notion and expectation of a glorious deliverer, described under the most divine characters, who was to appear in the fulness of time, and who, according to the prophecies concerning him, was to *make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness*, though they afterwards perverted the true sense of those prophecies to accommodate them to their own carnal prejudices, and to their worldly hopes and views.

But in the gospel this part of the divine economy is brought in

the clearest light ; and the idea that is there given of the Mediator is the noblest that can be conceived ; whether we consider the glorious dignity of his person, in which the divine and human nature is wonderfully united, or the offices ascribed to him, which are such as are admirably fitted to the great work upon which he was sent, the saving and redeeming mankind. What can possibly give us a higher idea of God's unparalleled grace and goodness, than that for us men, and for our salvation, he sent his own Son, to assume our nature, to instruct us as our great heavenly Teacher, and bring the clearest and fullest revelation of the divine will that was ever given to mankind ; and to make a declaration in the Father's name, of his free grace and mercy towards sinners of the human race, and of the gracious terms upon which he will receive them to his favour, and give them eternal life ; to guide and lead us by his own example, and exhibit in his own sacred life and practice the most perfect model of universal goodness and purity, and of every amiable virtue, for our imitation ; to make an atonement for our sins by his most meritorious obedience and sufferings, that he might obtain eternal redemption for us ; to give us a certain pledge and assurance of a blessed resurrection, and of the happiness prepared for good men in the highest heavens, by his own resurrection from the dead, his ascension into heaven, and exaltation to glory ; to rule us as the great King and Head of his Church, by his holy and most excellent laws and ordinances ; and to appear for us in the heavenly sanctuary as our great advocate with the Father, who ever continueth to interpose for sinful men, and in whose name we are to offer up our prayers, and to hope for the acceptance of our services. Add to this, that he is constituted the great dispenser of spiritual benefits, through whom God is pleased to communicate the blessings of his grace, and the aids of his Holy Spirit, for assisting us in our sincere endeavours, and training us up by a life of holy obedience for eternal felicity. And to complete the glorious scheme, this great Saviour and Mediator is appointed to raise the dead, and judge the world in the Father's name, and to dispense eternal retributions of rewards and punishments to men according to their deeds, the consideration of which must needs give a mighty weight to his authority and laws.

These are things great and astonishing, and which could not have entered into the human mind, if God had not revealed them. But now that they are revealed, they form a most grand and harmonious system, the several parts of which are like so many links of a beautiful chain, one part answering to another, and all concurring to exhibit an admirable plan, in which the wisdom, the grace, and goodness, and the righteousness of God, most eminently shine forth. So that, instead of being a just cause of objection against the Christian revelation, it rather furnisheth a new proof of its divine original, and that it was not a mere human invention, but came by revelation from God himself. A most glorious and amazing scene is here opened, which tendeth to fill the believing mind with the highest admiration and reverence, love and joy. It is

true, there are great difficulties attending the Christian scheme of the Mediator, and the doctrine of the Trinity which is connected with it. But there is nothing in it that can be proved to be contradictory or impossible, taking it in the simplicity in which it is delivered in holy writ, and not as it has been perplexed and obscured by the subtilties and rash decisions of men. And it would be a wrong and unreasonable conduct to reject a revelation of so excellent a nature, and such an admirable tendency, and enforced by so many convincing proofs and illustrious attestations, because there are some things in it of a high and mysterious nature, and attended with difficulties, which we are not well able to solve: for, surely, if we have good proof of its being a divine revelation, the authority of God is a sufficient reason for our receiving it, notwithstanding those difficulties. If we are resolved to admit nothing as true that hath great difficulties, nothing but what we are able clearly to explain, we must renounce all religion, and have recourse to atheism, which yet, besides its shocking and horrid consequences, hath the most unsurmountable difficulties of all. What is there more certain, and yet harder to form a distinct and consistent notion of, than absolute eternity? The immensity of the Supreme Being, whatever way we take of explaining it, is attended with difficulties too great for the human mind. There is not any thing in all nature more evident than the characters of wisdom and design in the frame of the universe; and yet there are many particular things relating to it, the design of which it is scarcely possible for us to account for in this present state, from whence persons of an atheistical turn have taken occasion to deny an infinitely wise presiding mind. The same thing may be said with regard to the goodness of God, which is established by the strongest proofs, and of which we feel the most lively sensations in our own breasts; and yet every one knows, who has carried his inquiries deep into these things, that there are many appearances which we find it extremely hard to reconcile to our ideas of goodness, and which probably never will be fully cleared till we have a more extensive view of the plan of the divine administration than now we can attain to. There is nothing we are more intimately conscious of than human liberty and free agency, or which is of greater importance to the very foundations of government and morality; and yet if we consider it metaphysically, no subject is attended with greater difficulties, as the ablest metaphysicians and philosophers in all ages have acknowledged. The same may be said of the notion of spiritual and material substance, and the infinite divisibility of the latter, and of many other things of the like nature. It is a principle, which hath been admitted by the greatest masters of reason, that when once a thing is proved by proper evidences, and arguments sufficient in their kind, we are not to reject it, merely because it may be attended with difficulties, which we know not how to solve. This principle is admitted in philosophy; it must be admitted with regard to natural religion; and why then should it not be admitted with regard to Christianity too?

As to the corruptions of Christians, and the abuses of Christianity, and the additions that have been made to it, which have furnished the deists with their most plausible objections, it ought to be considered, that the Christian religion cannot in reason be made accountable for those abuses and corruptions. The proper remedy in that case is not to throw off all regard for the gospel, but to endeavour to recover men from their deviations from it. And in this, the pains of those that pretend to a true liberty of thinking might be profitably employed. If they have a true regard to the happiness of mankind, and to the cause of virtue in the world, the best way to answer that design is, not to endeavour to expose the Scriptures to contempt, but to engage men to a greater veneration for those sacred oracles, and a closer adherence to them in doctrine and practice; not to attempt to set men free from the obligations of Christianity, but to do what they can, that the hearts and consciences of men may be brought under the power of its excellent instructions and important motives, and may be governed by its holy laws, which would be of the happiest consequence both to larger societies and particular persons.

To conclude: It is to be hoped that the view that hath been taken of the attempts which have been made against Christianity among us, beyond the example of former ages, instead of shocking the faith of true Christians, will only tend to convince them that it standeth upon the most solid foundation, not to be shaken by the malice or subtilty of its ablest adversaries. The strange eagerness so many have shown to subvert the credit and authority of the gospel, should awaken in us a well-conducted zeal for the interests of our holy religion, and should heighten our esteem for true uncorrupted Christianity as taught in the holy scriptures. We can never be sufficiently thankful to God for so glorious an advantage as that of the light of the gospel shining among us. This we should esteem the most valuable of all our privileges, and should regard every attempt to deprive us of it, as an attempt to deprive us of our happiness and glory, and to bring us into darkness and misery; to rob good men of their noblest joys and comforts, the most powerful helps, and the most animating motives to the practice of piety and virtue; and to free bad men from their apprehensions of the wrath of God and future punishment, and thereby remove the most effectual restraints to vice and wickedness. The cause of Christianity is the cause of God. Let us, therefore, take the most effectual methods in our power to maintain and to promote it. And this calleth for the united endeavours of all that bear the glorious name of Christians. A great deal has been done in this age in a way of reason and argument. But this, however proper and laudable, is not alone sufficient. For it is a thing which cannot be too much inculcated, that a mere notional and speculative belief of Christianity will be of small avail; and that the principal care of those who profess it should be, to get their hearts and lives brought under the governing influence of its divine doctrines and excellent precepts, that it may not be merely an outward form, but a living principle

within them. Among the many unhappy consequences which have arisen from the disputes that have with so much indecency and eagerness been carried on against our holy religion, this is not the least, that it hath carried men's minds too much off from the vital part of religion, and hath led them to regard it as a matter of speculation and dispute, rather than of practice. But this is to forget the very nature and design of Christianity, which is not a bare system of speculative opinions, but a practical institution, a spiritual and heavenly discipline, full of life and power, all whose *doctrines, precepts, ordinances, motives*, are manifestly intended to form us to a godlike temper, to real holiness of heart and life. And those good men who are not able to do much for it in a way of argumentation, may yet effectually promote its sacred interests, by walking according to the excellent rules of the gospel, and showing the advantageous influence it hath upon their temper and conduct, and thus making an amiable representation of it to the world. And though it highly becometh those, whose office it is to teach and instruct others, to be well furnished with divine knowledge, so as to be able by sound reason and argument to convince, or at least to confute, the gainsayers; yet one of the most essential services they can do to the Christian cause, is, by their doctrine and by their example to lead the Christian people into the practice of all holiness and goodness. This would tend more than any thing else to stop the mouths of adversaries, and would probably, as it did in many instances in the first ages of the Christian church, gain them over to a good opinion of that religion, which is fitted to produce such excellent fruits.

These are reflections which naturally arise upon this subject. But I shall not insist farther upon them at present; especially as I shall have occasion to resume some of them in an address to Deists and professed Christians, which I shall here subjoin as a proper conclusion of the whole work.

I am, dear and worthy Sir,

Your most affectionate and obliged

Friend and Servant,

JOHN LELAND.

THE CONCLUSION,

IN AN

ADDRESS TO DEISTS AND PROFESSED CHRISTIANS.

Those are inexcusable who reject Christianity at a venture, without due Examination.—Deistical Authors unsafe Guides, and shew little Sign of a fair and impartial Inquiry.—Several of their Objections such as cannot be reasonably urged against Christianity at all.—Those Objections only are of real Weight which tend to invalidate its Proofs and Evidences, or which are drawn from the Nature of the Religion itself, to shew that it is unworthy of God.—The Attempts of the Deists on each of these Heads shewn to be insufficient.—An Expostulation with them concerning the great Guilt and Danger of their Conduct, and the ill Consequences of it both to themselves and to the Community.—Those professed Christians highly culpable, who live in an habitual Negligence and Inconsideration with regard to Religion, or who alight public Worship and the Christian Institutions, or who indulge themselves in an immoral and vicious Practice.—A wicked Christian, of all Characters, the most inconsistent.—Advice to those who profess to believe the Gospel.—They should be thankful to God for their Privileges.—They should labour to be well acquainted with the Holy Scriptures.—And, above all, they should be careful to adorn their Profession by a holy and virtuous Life.—A Christian acting up to the Obligations of Christianity forms a glorious Character, which imparts a Splendour to the most exalted Station.—This illustriously exemplified in a great Personage of the highest Dignity.—The vast Importance of a careful Education of Children, and the bad Effects of neglecting it.—And here also the same eminent Example is recommended to the Imitation of all, especially of the great and noble.

HAVING endeavoured to give as clear a general view as I was able of the principal deistical writers of the last and present age, and having made large and particular remarks on the two most noted authors who have appeared of late among us in that cause, I shall now, as a conclusion of this work, take the liberty to address myself, both to those that take upon them the character of deists and free-thinkers, and who reject the Christian revelation; and to those who are honoured with the name of Christians, and who profess to receive the religion of Jesus as of divine authority.

The former may be ranked principally into two sorts. They are either such as, taking it for granted that Christianity has been proved to be an imposition on mankind, reject it at a venture, without being able to assign a reason for rejecting it, or at most take up with some slight objections, and content themselves with general clamours of priestcraft and imposture, without giving themselves the trouble of making a distinct inquiry into the nature of the religion itself, or examining its proofs and evidences; or, they are

such as pretend to reject Christianity, because, upon a due examination and inquiry, they have found it to be destitute of sufficient proof, and have discovered in it the marks of falsehood and imposture, which convince them that it cannot be of divine original. There is reason to apprehend, that the greater part of those among us who pass under the name of deists, come under the former of these characters. But the conduct of such persons is so manifestly absurd as to admit of no excuse. For what pretence have they to glory in the title of Free-thinkers, who will not be at the pains to think closely and seriously at all, even in matters of the highest consequence? There are few therefore who are willing to own that this is their case. Whether they have really given themselves the trouble of a free and diligent examination and inquiry, or not, they would be thought to have done so, and not to have rejected the Christian revelation without having good reasons for their unbelief. It is therefore to such persons that I would now address myself.

Of this sort professedly are those that have appeared among us under the character of deistical writers. They have made a show of attacking Christianity in a way of reason and argument. But, upon the view which hath been taken of them it may, I think, be safely declared, that whatever they have offered that had the face of argument, hath been solidly confuted, the evidences of Christianity have been placed in a fair and consistent light, and their objections against it have been shown to be vain and insufficient. Though there never were writers more confident and assuming, or who have expressed a greater admiration of themselves, and contempt of others, it hath been shown, that, taking them generally, they have had little to support such glorious pretences : that no writers ever acted a part more unfair and disingenuous : that though they have set up for advocates of natural religion in opposition to revealed, yet many of them have endeavoured to subvert the main articles even of natural religion, and have used arguments which bear equally against all religion, and tend to banish it out of the world : that they have often put on a show of great regard for genuine original Christianity, whilst at the same time they have used their utmost efforts to destroy its evidences, and subvert its authority : that instead of representing the Christian religion fairly as it is, they have had recourse to misrepresentation and abuse, and have treated the holy Scriptures in a manner which would not be borne, if put in practice against any other ancient writings of the least reputation, and which is indeed inconsistent with all the rules of candour and decency : that with regard to the extraordinary facts by which Christianity is attested, they have advanced principles which would be accounted perfectly ridiculous if applied to any other facts, and which really tend to destroy all moral evidence, and the credit of all past facts whatsoever : and finally, that never were there writers more inconsistent with themselves and with one another, or who have discovered more apparent signs of obstinate prepossession and prejudice. And should not all this naturally create a suspicion of a cause which stands in need of such management, and of writers who

have been obliged to have recourse to arts so little reconcileable to truth and candour? And yet it is to be apprehended, that many of those who laugh at others for relying upon their teachers, are ready to resign themselves to their deistical leaders, and to take their pretences and confident assertions, and even their jests and sarcasms, for arguments.

Many of the objections which have been produced with great pomp, and which have created some of the strongest prejudices against Christianity, are such as cannot be properly urged against it with any appearance of reason at all. Such are the objections drawn from the abuses and corruptions which have been introduced contrary to its original design, or from the ill conduct of many of its professors and ministers. For whilst the Christian religion, as taught by Christ and his apostles, and delivered in the holy Scriptures, may be demonstrated to be of a most useful and admirable nature and tendency, whilst the proofs and evidences of it stand entire, and the truth of the facts whereby it was attested is sufficiently established, the reason for embracing it still holds good: and to reject a religion in itself excellent, for abuses and corruptions, which many of those that make the objection acknowledge are not justly chargeable upon true original Christianity, is a conduct that cannot be justified, and is indeed contrary to the dictates of reason and good sense. The same observation may be made with regard to some other objections which have been frequently urged against the Christian revelation, and particularly that which is drawn from its not having been universally promulgated. For if the evidences which are brought to prove that Christianity is a true divine revelation, and that this revelation was really given, are good and valid, then its not having been made known to all mankind will never prove, that such a revelation was not given. And such a way of arguing in any other case would be counted impertinent. It is arguing from a thing, the reasons of which we do not know, against the truth and certainty of a thing that we do know, and of which we are able to bring sufficient proofs.

The only objections therefore, or arguments, which can really be of weight against Christianity, are those which either tend to invalidate its proofs and evidences, and to show that the divine attestations which were given to it are not to be depended upon, or which are drawn from the nature of the revelation itself, to show that it is absurd and unworthy of God. And accordingly both these have been attempted. But whosoever will impartially consider the writings of the deistical authors, and compare them with those of the advocates for Christianity, will find how little they have advanced on either of these heads that is really to the purpose. The attestations given to Christianity are of such an extraordinary nature, and carry in them such manifest proofs of a divine interposition, that few, if any, have ever owned the truth of those facts, and yet denied the divine original of the Christian revelation. Its adversaries therefore have chiefly bent their force to destroy the credit of the facts. But they have not been able to invalidate the arguments which have

been brought to prove that those facts were really done : it hath been shown, that the evidence produced for them is as great as could reasonably be expected and desired for any past facts whatsoever : that never was there any testimony, all things considered, more worthy of credit than that of the original witnesses to those facts : and that those accounts have been transmitted to us by a conveyance so sure and uninterrupted as can hardly be paralleled in any other case. This has been evinced by a clear deduction of proofs, to which little has been opposed but conjectures and suspicions of fraud, and general clamours against moral evidence, and human testimony, without taking off the force of the proofs that have been brought on the other side.

As to the arguments urged against the Christian revelation from the nature of the revelation itself, these must relate either to its doctrines or laws. With respect to the laws of Christianity, it cannot reasonably be denied, that its moral precepts are pure and excellent, and have a manifest tendency to promote the practice of piety and virtue in its just extent, and the peace and good order of the world. And they are enforced with the most powerful and important motives that can possibly be conceived, and the best fitted to work upon the human nature.

When the moral precepts of Christianity could not be justly found fault with, a great clamour has been raised against its positive precepts and institutions. And yet it is capable of being proved—it hath been often clearly proved, that these positive institutions, taken in their primitive purity, and according to their original design, are admirably fitted to promote the great ends of all religion, and to strengthen our obligations to a holy and a virtuous life. And this some of the most noted deistical writers have not been able to deny. And it has been lately fully acknowledged by Lord Bolingbroke.

The only objection, therefore, which properly remains is against the doctrines of Christianity. And before this objection can be properly brought to bear, two things are to be proved. The one is, that the doctrines objected against are doctrines of the true original Christian religion as taught by Christ and his apostles, and delivered in the holy Scriptures. The other is, that these doctrines, as there taught, are really absurd and contrary to reason. For a doctrine may be attended with great difficulties, very hard to be accounted for, and yet may be really true, and not contradictory to reason : which is evidently the case with respect to several important principles of what is called natural religion. The difficulty attending any doctrine, in our manner of conceiving it, is not a proper argument against its truth, if we have otherwise sufficient evidence to convince us that that doctrine is true ; and its being plainly asserted in a revelation proved to be divine is a sufficient evidence. For to acknowledge a divine revelation to have been given, and yet receive nothing upon the credit of it, nothing but what we can prove to be true, or at least highly probable, independently of that revelation, is a most absurd and inconsistent conduct. It is to make a divine testimony pass for nothing, and to pay no greater

regard to a thing on account of its being divinely revealed, than if it had not been revealed at all. In this case, what is said by a person who cannot be supposed to be prejudiced in favour of Christianity appears to be very reasonable; which I shall here beg leave to repeat, though I had occasion to take notice of it before, *viz.* that “when persons have received the Christian revelation for genuine, after sufficient examination of its external and internal proofs, and have found nothing that makes it inconsistent with itself, nor that is repugnant to any of those divine truths, which reason and the works of God demonstrate to them, such persons will never set up reason in contradiction to it, on account of things plainly taught, but incomprehensible as to their manner of being: if they did, their reason would be false and deceitful, they would cease to be reasonable men.”* And elsewhere, after having observed that we cannot be obliged to believe against reason, he saith, that when a revelation hath passed through the necessary trials, “it is to be received with the most profound reverence, with the most entire submission, and with the most unfeigned thanksgiving. Reason has exercised her whole prerogative then, and delivers us over to faith. To believe before all these trials, or to doubt after them, is alike unreasonable.”†

And now, upon such a view of things, you will allow me, gentlemen, seriously to expostulate with you, and to beseech you to reflect whether, in rejecting and endeavouring to expose Christianity, you act a wise and reasonable part, and what is like to be the effect of your conduct both with regard to yourselves, and to the public.

And first with regard to yourselves. Consider that the case now before you is not merely a matter of indifference, or of small importance. Your own most essential interests are nearly concerned. If the gospel be true and divine, to reject it will involve you in the greatest guilt, and will expose you to the greater danger. The best that can be said of your case upon such a supposition is, that it is infinitely hazardous. If in fact it should be found, that you have rejected a true divine revelation, which God himself hath confirmed with the most illustrious attestations; that you have refused the testimony which he had given of his Son, and have poured contempt on the Saviour whom he hath in his infinite wisdom and love provided for us; that you have slighted the authority of his laws, and the offers of his grace, and have despised all his glorious promises, and set at nought his awful threatenings; this cannot possibly be a slight guilt, and therefore you have reason in that case to apprehend the severe effects of the divine displeasure. Whatever favourable allowances may be made to those who never heard of the gospel, or had no opportunity of being instructed in it in its original purity, it is plain, from the whole tenor of the gospel declarations, that those to whom it is clearly published, and who have its evidences plainly laid before them, and yet shut their eyes against the heavenly light, and despise its offered salvation, are in a very dangerous state.

* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. v. p. 384.

† Ibid. p. 279.

And though it may be said, that this is immediately to be understood of those who lived in the age when the gospel was first published, yet it holds in proportion with regard to those in after-ages, to whom that revelation and its evidences are made known, and who yet wilfully reject it. For since God designed that revelation not merely for the age when it was first delivered, but for succeeding ages; and since accordingly it was so ordered, that both the revelation itself, its doctrines and laws, and an account of the divine attestations that were given to it, have been transmitted to us in such a manner, as layeth a just foundation for our being assured, that this is the true original revelation, and that these facts were really done; then the obligation which lies upon those to whom that revelation is made known to receive and submit to it, and consequently the guilt of rejecting it, still subsists. Examine the revelation itself. Could you possibly expect a revelation given for nobler purposes, than to instruct us to form the most worthy notions of God, of his perfections, and of his providence, to set before us the whole of our duty in its just extent, to instruct us in the terms of our acceptance with God, to assure us of his readiness to pardon our iniquities, and to receive us to his grace and favour upon our unfeigned repentance, and to crown our sincere though imperfect obedience with the glorious reward of eternal life? Could any revelation be expected, whose precepts are more pure and excellent, or enforced by more weighty motives, or the uniform tendency of which is more manifestly fitted to promote the cause of virtue and righteousness in the world? Or, could any revelation, supposing a revelation really given, be attended with more illustrious attestations? Will it be an excuse fit to be offered to the great Ruler and Judge of the world, that you did not yourselves see the miracles that were wrought, nor were witnesses to the attestations that were given? This is in effect to demand, that all these facts should be done over again for your conviction, or you will not believe them. But how unreasonable is this, when the accounts of these facts are transmitted with a degree of evidence sufficient to satisfy any unprejudiced mind, an evidence which must be admitted, except no past facts at all are to be believed, and which you yourselves would account sufficient in any other case! Or, will it be accepted as a just excuse, that it contains some doctrines, which are attended with great difficulties that we are not able to account for, and which relate to things that transcend our comprehension, when at the same time it cannot be denied that there are several things both in religion and philosophy which the most wise and considering men think it reasonable to believe, though they are liable to objections which they cannot give a clear solution of? Or, is the true reason of your rejecting the gospel your aversion to its holy laws, and that

* One of the most subtle writers that have of late appeared against Christianity, says, "that no priestly dogmas ever shocked common sense so much as the infinite divisibility of matter, with its consequences," which yet has not hindered the ablest mathematicians from believing it to be demonstrably true. And he gives some other instances of the like kind. See Hume's Philosophical Essays, p. 346, 347.

purity of heart and life that is there required? But is this a reason fit to be pleaded before God, or proper to satisfy your own consciences? "This is the condemnation," saith our Saviour, "that light is come into the world, but men have loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil." If this should be found to be really your case, and the true cause of your opposition to the gospel, your guilt is of a very aggravated nature! It is to hate and oppose the light that should convince and reform you, and to make the very excellence of the gospel a reason for rejecting it. The best and wisest men in all ages have owned the necessity of keeping the appetites and passions within proper bounds, and in a just subjection to the dominion of reason. And this is the great design of the Christian law. And yet its precepts are not carried to an unreasonable rigour and austerity: it is not designed to extinguish the passions, but to moderate them, and allows them to be gratified within the bounds of temperance and innocence. Its precepts, if reduced to practice, would both tend to the true dignity and perfection of our nature, and lay a just foundation for an inward tranquillity and satisfaction of mind, and for a true moral liberty, the noblest liberty in the world; as no slavery is to be compared to a moral servitude, which consisteth in a vassalage to the vicious appetites and passions. A life led in conformity to the gospel precepts, is, whatever you may think of it, the most delightful life in the world. It tendeth to improve and enlarge the social affections, to inspire an universal benevolence, to render men good and useful in every relation, and to restrain and govern those furious and malignant passions of envy, hatred, and revenge, which carry torment and bitterness in their nature. It directs us to a rational piety and devotion towards God, and tends to produce a noble and ingenuous confidence in him, and an entire resignation to his will, and to refresh and cheer the soul with a consciousness of the divine approbation. To this add the satisfactions and joys arising from all the wonders of the divine grace and goodness, as displayed in the gospel, from the charms of redeeming love, and the great things Christ hath done and suffered for our salvation, from the glorious promises of the new covenant, from the gracious aids and influences of the Holy Spirit, and from the ravishing and transporting prospects that are before us. A blessed resurrection and immortal life! You will be ready perhaps to charge this as enthusiasm: but I see no reason for it, except the noblest emotions of the human mind, and the exercise of our best affections upon the best and most excellent objects, must pass under that name. Consider, I beseech you, what valuable privileges, what divine satisfaction, what ravishing prospects, you deprive yourselves of by your infidelity! And what have you in exchange, but perplexing doubts and uncertainties, gloomy prospects, and what you will hardly be able to get entirely rid of, anxious suspicions and fears enough, where they prevail, to mar the comfort and satisfaction of life!

But let me now in the next place desire you to reflect upon what may be the consequences of your conduct with regard to the public.

There are great and general complaints, and it were to be wished there was not a just foundation for them, of a dissoluteness of manners which seems to be growing among us. This is a matter in which the interests of the community are very nearly concerned. When once the corruption spreads through all orders and degrees of persons, those in higher and in lower stations, it must needs be attended with a perversion of all public order, and sap the very foundation of the public glory and happiness. In proportion as vice and dissoluteness prevail, it produces a neglect of honest industry, trade consequently decays, fraud and violence increase, the reverence of oaths is lost, and all the ties and bands that keep society together are in danger of being dissolved. Machiavel himself has decided, that a free government cannot be long maintained, when once a people are become generally corrupt. All true friends therefore to the public order and liberty must wish, that virtue may flourish, and that men's vicious appetites and passions may be kept under proper restraints. And nothing is so fit to answer this end as religion. If the influence of religion were removed from the minds of men, and there were no fear of God before their eyes, civil laws would be found feeble restraints. This the ablest politicians have been sensible of, and never was there any civilized government that did not take in religion for its support.* And it may be easily proved that never was there any religion so well fitted for answering all these purposes as the Christian. The two latest writers who have appeared against Christianity have made full acknowledgments of the great usefulness of religion, especially that part of it which relateth to future rewards and punishments, to public communities: though both of them have most inconsistently endeavoured to subvert that doctrine of future retributions, the belief of which they own to be necessary for preserving public peace and order. Mr. Hume, speaking of the received notion, that "the deity will inflict punishments on vice, and infinite rewards on virtue," says that "those who attempt to disabuse them of such prejudices, may, for aught he knows, be good reasoners, but he cannot allow them to be good citizens and politicians; since they free men from one restraint upon their passions, and make the infringement of the laws of equity

* Lord Bolingbroke observes, that "the good effects of maintaining, and bad effects of neglecting, religion, were extremely visible in the whole course of the Roman government.—That though the Roman religion established by Numa was very absurd, yet by keeping up an awe of superior power, and the belief of a providence that ordered the course of events, it produced all the marvellous effects which Machiavel after Polybius, Cicero, and Plutarch, ascribes to it." He adds, that "the neglect of religion was a principal cause of the evils that Rome afterwards suffered. Religion decayed, and the state decayed with her." And if even a false religion, by keeping up an awe of superior power, and the belief of a providence, had so advantageous influence on the prosperity of the state, and the neglect of religion brought such pains upon it; can they possibly be regarded as true friends to the public, who take so much pains to subvert the religion professed among us, a religion established upon the rational and solid foundations, and to set men loose from the awe of a superior power, and the belief of a providence ordering the course of events, and the manifest tendency of whose attempts and endeavours is to leave us without any religion at all?

* Lord Bolingbroke's Works, vol. iv. p. 128.

purity of heart and life that is there required? But is this a reason fit to be pleaded before God, or proper to satisfy your own consciences? "This is the condemnation," saith our Saviour, "that light is come into the world, but men have loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil." If this should be found to be really your case, and the true cause of your opposition to the gospel, your guilt is of a very aggravated nature! It is to hate and oppose the light that should convince and reform you, and to make the very excellence of the gospel a reason for rejecting it. The best and wisest men in all ages have owned the necessity of keeping the appetites and passions within proper bounds, and in a just subjection to the dominion of reason. And this is the great design of the Christian law. And yet its precepts are not carried to an unreasonable rigour and austerity: it is not designed to extinguish the passions, but to moderate them, and allows them to be gratified within the bounds of temperance and innocence. Its precepts, if reduced to practice, would both tend to the true dignity and perfection of our nature, and lay a just foundation for an inward tranquillity and satisfaction of mind, and for a true moral liberty, the noblest liberty in the world; as no slavery is to be compared to a moral servitude, which consisteth in a vassalage to the vicious appetites and passions. A life led in conformity to the gospel precepts, is, whatever you may think of it, the most delightful life in the world. It tendeth to improve and enlarge the social affections, to inspire an universal benevolence, to render men good and useful in every relation, and to restrain and govern those furious and malignant passions of envy, hatred, and revenge, which carry torment and bitterness in their nature. It directs us to a rational piety and devotion towards God, and tends to produce a noble and ingenuous confidence in him, and an entire resignation to his will, and to refresh and cheer the soul with a consciousness of the divine approbation. To this add the satisfactions and joys arising from all the wonders of the divine grace and goodness, as displayed in the gospel, from the charms of redeeming love, and the great things Christ hath done and suffered for our salvation, from the glorious promises of the new covenant, from the gracious aids and influences of the Holy Spirit, and from the ravishing and transporting prospects that are before us. A blessed resurrection and immortal life! You will be ready perhaps to charge this as enthusiasm: but I see no reason for it, except the noblest emotions of the human mind, and the exercise of our best affections upon the best and most excellent objects, must pass under that name. Consider, I beseech you, what valuable privileges, what divine satisfaction, what ravishing prospects, you deprive yourselves of by your infidelity! And what have you in exchange, but perplexing doubts and uncertainties, gloomy prospects, and what you will hardly be able to get entirely rid of, anxious suspicions and fears enough, where they prevail, to mar the comfort and satisfaction of life!

But let me now in the next place desire you to reflect upon what may be the consequences of your conduct with regard to the public.

tion and government, which is founded on an attempt to maintain Christianity in its purity as delivered in the holy Scriptures, a zeal for which will always prove its greatest security?

I hope, gentlemen, you will forgive the freedom of this expostulatory address, which is not designed to reproach you, or to return railing for railing, which our holy religion forbids, but proceeds from an earnest concern for your happiness, and for promoting your best interests here and hereafter, as well as from a desire, as far as my ability reaches, to serve the public, the welfare of which is very nearly concerned in the consequences of your conduct.

I shall now beg leave to address myself to those who profess to value themselves upon the name of Christians; a name truly glorious, expressive of the most sacred obligations and engagements, the most valuable privileges, and the most sublime hopes. But the bare name of Christians will be of little advantage, without the true spirit and practice of Christianity. And it is impossible for any friend to religion and to mankind to observe, without a very sensible concern, what numbers there are of those who would take it ill not to be called and accounted Christians, that yet take little care to act suitably to that sacred and honourable character.

Many professed Christians there are, who scarcely ever bestow a serious thought upon those things which it is the great design of the gospel to inculcate on the hearts and minds of men. Let me desire such persons to reflect a little what an inconsistent conduct they are guilty of. To profess to believe that God hath sent his Son from heaven with messages of grace to sinful men, and to bring discoveries of the highest importance, in which our everlasting salvation is very nearly concerned, and yet not to allow these things a place in their thoughts, and to prefer the veriest trifles before them! Will you dare to say in words, that you do not think it worth your while to attend to what God thought fit to send his own Son to reveal? Why then do you act as if you thought so? No pretence of worldly business, though it is our duty to be diligent in it, can excuse an utter habitual inconsideration and neglect of those things, which, by professing to believe Christianity, we profess to believe to be of the greatest importance. Much less will a hurry of diversions be allowed to be a sufficient excuse. And yet how many are there whose time is taken up in low trifling pleasures and amusements, and who make that which at best should only be the entertainment of a vacant hour, the very business of their lives! It is to be lamented, that this is too often the case with persons distinguished by their birth, their fortunes, and figure, in the world. As if all the advantage they proposed by those shining distinctions, was only the privilege of leading idle unmeaning lives, useless to themselves, and to the community. Can reasonable creatures think, that by such a constant trifling away their precious time, they answer the end of their beings, the end for which they had the noble powers of reason given them? As if they were sent into the world only to divert themselves. Much less can Christians believe,

that they were formed for no higher and more valuable purposes. How often are the duties of the church and closet, those of the social relations, the care of children and of families, the kind offices and exercises of a noble and generous benevolence towards the poor, the indigent, the afflicted and disconsolate, neglected and postponed, for the sake of the most trifling amusements; an immoderate fondness and attachment to which tends, even when it is least hurtful, to produce a disinclination to serious thought, and to impair the relish for that which is truly good, excellent, and improving!

But this is still worse, when what are called diversions, tend to lay snares for virtue and innocence, and open the way to scenes of dissoluteness and debauchery. Or, when what is called play and amusement is carried to such an excess as to hurt and squander away fortunes, which might be employed to the most valuable and useful purposes, and thereby disables persons of distinguished rank from the duties they owe to their families and to the community, from the exercise of generous charity and benevolence, and even of justice too. To which may be added, the tendency it often hath to excite and exercise unworthy and disorderly passions, and to produce the habits of fraud, falsehood, and a base illiberal thirst after gain.

If our own observation and experience did not convince us of it, one would scarcely think there could be persons who profess to believe the gospel, and to acknowledge its divine authority, and yet live in an habitual neglect of its public worship and sacred institutions. But that such a neglect is becoming general among us, beyond the example of former times, cannot escape the notice of the most superficial observer. There scarcely ever was an institution more wisely and beneficially calculated for preserving and promoting the interests of religion and virtue in the world, than that of setting apart one day in a week from worldly businesses and cares, for the solemnities of public worship, and for instructing the people in the knowledge of religion, and exhorting them to the practice of it; and yet many there are that would take it ill not to be accounted Christians, who seem to affect an open neglect, or even contempt of it. But it is not easy to conceive, what reasonable pretence or excuse can be alleged for such a conduct. Will they, in good earnest, aver, that they look upon it to be a reflection upon their sense, or unworthy of their quality, to pay their public homage to their Maker and Redeemer; and to make open professions of their regard to that religion, which yet they would be thought to believe? Or, have they such an aversion to the exercises of religion, that the spending an hour or two in solemn acts of adoration, in prayer and thanksgiving, and in receiving instructions and admonitions from his holy word, is a weariness which they cannot bear? But what is this, but to avow the great degeneracy of their own minds, and their want of a proper temper and disposition for the noblest exercises, which best deserve the attention of reasonable beings? Or, do they pretend a high regard for moral virtue, as an excuse for neglecting positive institutions? But will any man, of the least reflection,

who knoweth the true state of things among us, take upon him to declare, that the growing neglect of the ordinances of religion hath contributed to the promoting the practice of virtue? Or, that men's morals are generally mended, since they became more indifferent to those sacred solemnities? Nothing is more evident to any one, who impartially considereth the nature of those divine institutions and ordinances, which are appointed in the gospel, than that a due observance of them according to their original institution, besides its being a public avowal of our religious homage, and of our faith in God, and in our Lord Jesus Christ, hath a manifest tendency to promote our moral improvement, and to exercise and strengthen those good affections and dispositions which naturally lead to a holy and virtuous practice.

And as there are too many professed Christians, who openly neglect the institutions of religion, there are others who seem to flatter themselves that a mere outward attendance on divine ordinances, and the keeping up a form of religion, will be alone sufficient, though they at the same time indulge themselves in a practice contrary to the rules of virtue and morality. But all expedients for reconciling the practice of vice, of dissoluteness, or dishonesty, with the faith and hope of the gospel, are visibly absurd and vain. The most inconsistent of all characters is a wicked and vicious Christian, which to any one that is acquainted with the true nature and design of Christianity, seems to be a kind of contradiction in terms. For nothing is more evident than that a bad and dissolute life is the most manifest contradiction to the whole design of the gospel revelation. What a strange inconsistency is it for persons to profess themselves the disciples of the holy Jesus, and yet to counteract the very end he came into the world for! To profess to hope for salvation from him as promised in the gospel, and yet to neglect the necessary terms, without which, we are there assured, salvation is not to be obtained! To believe that he came to destroy the works of the devil, and yet allow themselves in those works which he came to destroy! What an unamiable representation do such persons make of Christianity, if a judgment were to be formed of it from their conduct and practice! You would perhaps conceive a horror at the thought of blaspheming Christ, and openly renouncing all hope of salvation from him, and yet the plain tendency of your practice is to harden the hearts of infidels, and give occasion to the enemies of Christianity to blaspheme. And should not you tremble to think of being charged as accessory to the indignities and reproaches cast on that venerable name into which you were baptized, and on that excellent system of religion, whose divine original you profess to believe? Surely then it highly concerneth you, for your own sakes, and that of the gospel, to set yourselves heartily to reform a conduct so irreconcilable to all the rules of reason, and to your own most evident interests. Implore the mercy of God through Jesus Christ, and the assistances of his grace, which shall not be wanting to the truly penitent, and show yourselves Christians, by endeavouring to get your souls effectually brought under the influence of our holy

religion, the natural tendency of which, wherever it is sincerely believed and embraced, is to inspire an ingenuous hope, confidence, and joy.

I shall conclude therefore with laying a few advices before those who take upon them the name of Christians, and who profess to receive the gospel as of divine authority.

And 1. Let us be thankful to God for our glorious privileges. It is our unspeakable advantage, that we are not left merely to the uncertain lights, or feeble conjectures of our own unassisted reason in matters of the highest importance. We have God himself instructing us by his word concerning his own glorious perfections, and his governing providence, as extending to the individuals of the human race, displaying all the riches of his grace and goodness towards perishing sinners, setting our duty before us in its just extent, and animating us to the practice of it by the most exceeding great and precious promises, and assuring us of the aids of his Holy Spirit to assist our weak endeavours. We are raised to the most glorious hopes and views. A happiness is provided for us as the reward of our patient continuance in well-doing, transcending all that we are now able to express, or even to conceive. These things certainly call for a devout admiration and adoring thankfulness, and for all the returns of love and gratitude that are in our power. Our civil liberties are justly to be valued, but our privileges as Christians are of a yet higher and nobler nature.

2dly, Another thing which naturally follows upon this is, that we should consider and improve the revelation we profess to believe, and that we should endeavour to be well acquainted with it, especially as it is contained in the holy Scriptures. There those discoveries are to be found which God was pleased to make of his will at sundry times and in divers manners, by the mouth of his holy prophets; but especially there is that last and most perfect revelation he gave by his well-beloved Son. We are ready to think they had a mighty advantage who saw our Saviour in the flesh, who heard his excellent discourses, and were witnesses to his holy life, and to the miracles he performed. And in the sacred writings we have all these things faithfully recorded. Those very discourses which he delivered are there transmitted to us, with an account of the wonderful works he did, his most holy and useful life, and most perfect example. What a strange inconsistent conduct would it be, to profess to believe that there is a revelation given from heaven relating to matters of the highest moment, and that this revelation is contained in the holy Scriptures, and yet to suffer the Bible to lie neglected by us, as if this, which is the most worthy of all our attention, were the only book that deserved no attention at all! Let us therefore search the Scriptures, which are able to make us wise unto salvation. And if we meet with difficulties there, as may justly be expected in such ancient writings, and which relate to a great variety of things, some of them of a very extraordinary nature, let not this discourage us. For besides that by a careful considering and comparing the Scriptures themselves, and making a proper use of the

who knoweth the true state of things among us, take upon him to declare, that the growing neglect of the ordinances of religion hath contributed to the promoting the practice of virtue? Or, that men's morals are generally mended, since they became more indifferent to those sacred solemnities? Nothing is more evident to any one, who impartially considereth the nature of those divine institutions and ordinances, which are appointed in the gospel, than that a due observance of them according to their original institution, besides its being a public avowal of our religious homage, and of our faith in God, and in our Lord Jesus Christ, hath a manifest tendency to promote our moral improvement, and to exercise and strengthen those good affections and dispositions which naturally lead to a holy and virtuous practice.

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religion tends to inspire him with a true sense of honour, as that signifieth an abhorrence of every thing base, false, unjust, and impure, and with a real greatness of soul, and a noble constancy and fortitude, not to be *bribed* or *terrified* from his duty.

Such a character, even in a low condition, as far as it hath an opportunity of exerting itself, cannot but attract the approbation and esteem of those that observe it. But when it is found in conjunction with *nobility of extraction, dignity of station, splendour and affluence* of fortune, what a glory does it diffuse! And it gives a real pleasure to every friend to Christianity among us to reflect, that of this we have an illustrious instance in a *person* of the most exalted dignity, but who is still more distinguished by her *princely* and Christian virtues, than by the *eminency* of her station. We have here a shining proof, what a just and general esteem and admiration, solid rational piety, a well-regulated zeal for Christianity, and a life amiably conducted by its sacred rules, in a condition so elevated, has a natural tendency to create, and what a *splendour* and *beauty* it adds to the highest *titles* and *dignities*. And if persons distinguished by their rank and figure in life were more generally careful to copy after so bright a pattern, it is to be hoped, this might happily contribute to reform the licentiousness of the age; and that the influence of their authority and example would extend to those inferior stations, and have a general good effect; particularly that it would tend to cure that *false* and *vicious shame*, which has so often discouraged persons from openly avowing their regard and adherence to that which is the ornament and glory of our nature, religion and virtue.

It is proper to observe, in the last place, that those who have any true zeal for Christianity, and who really believe it to be the most excellent religion, are bound by every obligation to endeavour to promote it in their own families, by carefully training up their children to an early acquaintance with this holy religion, and veneration for it. It is of great consequence to endeavour to season their young and tender minds with its important principles, and to inspire them with a just reverence of things sacred, with a love of goodness and virtue, and an abhorrence of what is base, false, vicious, and impure. The necessity of an early good education, and the benefits arising from it, have been acknowledged by the best and wisest men in all ages. And we have certainly a mighty advantage this way, who enjoy the light of the gospel revelation. And therefore it highly concerneth Christian parents to do what they can, that their children may be by times *acquainted with the holy scriptures*, and may have the *word of Christ dwelling richly* in them. Minds which are early filled and possessed with the great objects of religion, and with the noble and sublime hopes of the gospel, carry about with them the most effectual preservation against the vanities and follies, the corrupt customs and practices, of a sinful world, and the most animating motives to the practice of every amiable virtue, and universal righteousness. And yet this, which is the most important and most essential part of a good education, seems to be that which

helps that are afforded us, we may have the satisfaction of having many of those difficulties cleared up to us, it must be observed, that those things that are most necessary to be known, and which are of the greatest importance, are there most plainly revealed, and frequently inculcated; and these things we should especially labour to get impressed upon our hearts and consciences.

But that which should be our principal concern, is to take care that our whole conversation be such as becometh the gospel of Christ, worthy of our glorious privileges and sublime hopes. He must be an utter stranger to Christianity who is not sensible that it lays us under the most sacred obligations, and gives us the greatest helps and encouragements to a holy and virtuous practice. Let us, therefore, as we would secure our own salvation and happiness, and would promote the honour of our blessed Redeemer, and of the revelation he brought from heaven, endeavour to adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour by all the virtues of a sober, a righteous, and godly life. A mere form of godliness will not be sufficient; the power, the energy, the beauty of religion, must appear in our whole temper and conduct. This is in a peculiar manner expected of those who are honoured with the office of the holy ministry. But the gospel is not designed merely for any particular order of men, but to extend its influence to persons of all orders and degrees. And how amiable is the idea of a Christian acting up to the obligations of Christianity!

Consider him in the exercise of piety and devotion towards God, diligent in attending on the ordinances of religion, filled with a profound reverence of the divine Majesty, with a devout admiration of the supreme original Goodness and Excellence, his soul rising in grateful emotions towards his sovereign Benefactor, exercising an unrepining submission and resignation to his will; and a steady dependence on his providence, rejoicing in Christ Jesus as his Saviour and Lord, in the beauties of his example, and in the wonders of his love.

But the religion of a real Christian is not confined to immediate acts of devotions. It influenceth and animateth his whole conduct. It teacheth him to render unto all their dues, to be strictly just and generously honest, to behave suitably in every relation, the *conjugal*, *parental*, and *filial* relation, and to fulfil the duties of the *civil* and *social* life. It tendeth to suppress the bitter and malevolent affections, and to diffuse a sweetness and complacency through his whole behaviour. It maketh him ready to bear with the infirmities of others, to rejoice in their happiness, and endeavour to promote it, and instead of *being overcome of evil, to overcome evil with good*.

Behold him in another view, as exercising a noble self-government, keeping his appetites and passions under a proper discipline, and in a regular subjection to the laws of religion and reason, disdaining to dishonour and defile his body and soul with unclean lusts, and vicious excesses, yet not unreasonably austere, but allowing himself the moderate and cheerful use of the innocent pleasures and enjoyments of life, and every enjoyment heightened by the glorious prospects which are before him. To which it may be added, that

and extensive influence, of great use in the present age, and the effects of which may be transmitted to succeeding generations.

How happy would it be for these nations, if, in conformity to an example so justly admired, the *great* and *noble* would look upon the care of their children and families to be one of the worthiest objects of their attention and concern ! This could scarcely fail to have a good effect upon those of the lower rank. Then might we hope to see religion and virtue flourish, and a new and hopeful generation springing up among us, the surest earnest of national glory and happiness. For it is a maxim of undoubted truth, as well as of great importance, That a careful education of children will lay the best foundation for well-ordered families, as these will contribute the most of any thing to the peace and good order of the community.

I shall conclude this address with the admirable words of St. Paul : " Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report ; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things."

I have now finished the design I undertook, and which hath been carried on to a much greater length than I at first designed. God grant that what hath been offered in this volume, may answer the end for which it was sincerely intended, the serving the cause of important truth, piety, and virtue in the world, and especially in these nations, in which such open insults have been offered to religion, and particularly to the holy Gospel of our blessed Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. For myself, what I desire above all things, is, that I may feel the power and influence of that excellent religion upon my own soul, animating and regulating my conduct in life, supporting and comforting me in death, and preparing me for that better state which we are raised to the hope of by the gospel.

APPENDIX.

CONTAINING REFLECTIONS ON THE PRESENT STATE OF THINGS IN THESE NATIONS.

There is a great and growing Corruption in these Lands, notwithstanding the signal Advantages we enjoy.—This Corruption not justly chargeable on our Religion as Christians and Protestants, but on the Neglect or Contempt of it.—The unaccountable Eagerness that hath been shown in spreading the principles of Infidelity, of very ill Consequence to the Public.—The Tendency of Irreligion and Vice to bring Misery and Ruin upon a People, both in the natural Course of Things, and by the just Judgments of God.—Many things in the late and present Course of God's Dispensations have an alarming Appearance.—Repentance and Reformation, and a strict Adherence to the Faith and Practice of Christianity, the properest Way of averting the Tokens of the divine Displeasure, and promoting the national Prosperity.—The happy State of Things which this would introduce.

Though the following considerations do not directly and immediately relate to the *View of the Deistical Writers*, yet they may perhaps come in not improperly as an appendix to it; and will, I hope, not be thought altogether unsuitable to the general nature and design of the preceding work.

It was with great satisfaction that I read the order for a General and Public Fast, to be religiously observed by all his Majesty's subjects in these kingdoms, and which is drawn up with great seriousness and solemnity. It is there acknowledged, that "the manifold sins and wickedness of these kingdoms have most justly deserved heavy and severe punishments from the hand of heaven." We are called upon to humble ourselves before almighty God, and in a most devout and solemn manner to send up our prayers and supplications to the divine Majesty, to avert all those judgments which we most justly have deserved, to continue his mercies, and perpetuate the enjoyment of the Protestant religion among us, and safety and prosperity to his Majesty's kingdoms and dominions.

Having so great an authority to bear me out, I shall add some reflections, which have made a deep impression upon my mind, with reference to the present state of things among us.

We have been eminently distinguished above most other nations by happy privileges and advantages. Providence hath blessed us with an abundance of those things which are usually thought to contribute to the public prosperity and happiness. Never had any people a fuller enjoyment of liberty; a profusion of wealth has flowed in upon us by our widely extended commerce. We have had great advantages for improvement in the arts and sciences, and every branch of useful knowledge: especially that which is the

most valuable and important of all others, the knowledge of religion in its truth and purity. The light of the glorious gospel of Christ, freed from the absurdities, the superstitions, and idolatries with which it hath been incumbered in many other countries professing the Christian Faith, hath long shone among us. The holy Scriptures are not locked up in an unknown tongue, nor confined to the studies of the learned, but are put into the hands of the people : so that all men may have access to that sacred rule of faith and practice, the original standard of the Christian religion. The treasures of knowledge are opened, and the public instructions so frequently and freely dispensed, that it may be said, that "wisdom crieth without, she uttereth her voice in the streets."

It might be expected, that a people so distinguished by advantages for religious and moral improvement, should also be remarkably distinguished by the knowledge and practice of piety, wisdom, and virtue, and by a zeal for our holy religion. But though it is to be hoped there are many among us, who are unfeignedly thankful for our inestimable privileges, and careful to make a right improvement of them, yet it cannot be denied, that a great corruption hath spread itself, and seems to be growing among all orders and degrees of men. This is a very disagreeable subject ; but the first step to a proper remedy is to be duly sensible of the true state of our own case. Our wealth and plenty hath been abused to an amazing luxury, and our liberty to a boundless licentiousness. Many act as if they had no other way of showing that they are free but by casting off all restraints, and setting themselves loose from all the ties of religion and virtue. Atheism hath appeared almost without disguise ; or, which in effect comes to the same thing, the disbelief of a Providence, of God's moral attributes and government, and of a future state. The most virulent reproach and contempt hath been cast upon the adorable Jesus, and the methods of our redemption and salvation by him. All that part of our duty which more immediately relateth to the supreme Being, seemeth to be regarded by many as a matter of indifference. And the slightest observation may convince us, that there is a growing neglect of public worship, as if the properest way of showing our gratitude to God for the glorious privilege we have of worshipping him according to the dictates of our own consciences, were not to render him any public homage or religious worship at all. That holy day, which is by divine appointment, and by that of our own laws, set apart from worldly businesses and cares, for the purposes of religion, for receiving public instructions, and for attending on divine worship, hath been treated with great contempt. And in this too many of those who, by their authority and influence, should set a good example to others, have unhappily led the way. Can there be a greater contempt cast upon it than to hold gaming assemblies on that day ? And when this is done by persons of rank, can it be wondered at, that by the lower kind of people it is often the worst employed of any day in the week, and devoted to idleness and vice ? And it cannot but give concern to every good mind, that an

institution, so admirably calculated for the advancement of religious knowledge, piety, and virtue, and for promoting good order in the community, should be so strangely perverted and abused.

Having mentioned the practice of gaming, I cannot help observing, that among other unfavourable symptoms of the growing corruption among us, this is not the least, that that practice is of late years become more general, and carried to a greater excess, than has been known before in these kingdoms. The wisest men of all nations have been so sensible both of the pernicious effects of this vice to particular persons and families, and its ill influence on the community, that it would fill a large volume barely to recite the laws that have been made against it, both in former and latter ages. Our own laws have fixed a brand upon it, and in effect declared the gain made by it to be dishonourable and infamous; yet is the being instructed in the mysteries of it become a necessary part of education, whilst the seasoning the tender minds of young persons with principles of religion and just sentiments of things, and forming them to the worthiest practices, is, it is to be feared, in a great measure neglected.

But what affordeth the most melancholy apprehensions is, the great corruption and depravity of manners which is so generally and justly complained of.—The most blasphemous abuse of the name of God, by shocking oaths and imprecations, and the most corrupt and wilful perjuries, drunkennesses, and excesses of riot, but especially by the excessive drinking of distilled spirituous liquors, the health, morals, and religion of the laborious and useful parts of these kingdoms are well-nigh destroyed. Fired with this infernal poison, they are spirited to perpetrate and execute the most bold, daring, and mischievous enterprizes, and, shaking off all fear and shame, become audaciously impudent in all manner of vice, lewdness, immorality, and profaneness, in defiance of all laws human and divine. But it doth not stop here: its malignant influence reaches to the children yet unborn, who come half-burnt up and shrivelled into the world, and who, as soon as born, suck in this deadly poison with their mother's or nurse's milk: so that, if this worse than all plagues be suffered to go on, it will make a general havoc, especially amongst the soldiers, sailors, and laborious part of the nation, who are manifestly degenerated from the more manly constitutions of preceding generations.* Besides an amazing

* See "Distilled Spirituous Liquors the Bane of the Nation," 8vo. 2nd Edit. 1756, London. Dr. Stephen Hales's "Friendly Admonition to the Drinkers of Gin, Brandy, and other Spirituous Liquors, which are so destructive of the Industry, Morals, Health, and Lives of the People;" a new edition with additions, and an appendix; and is in the catalogue of the books distributed by the Society for promoting Christian Knowledge, London.—This worthy divine and excellent philosopher (whose whole life has been usefully employed in promoting the honour of God and the welfare of mankind), in a treatise upon the distilling of sea-water, and the use of ventilators, &c., just published, speaking of distilled spirituous liquors, says—"How much therefore does it behove all, who have any concern for the honour and dignity of their own kindred species, any indignation at its being thus debased and disgraced, any bowels of pity for the vast multitudes, not less perhaps than a million, that are yearly destroyed all over the world, by the moral as well as natural, and therefore

dissoluteness, and impurities of all kinds, even those that are most unnatural, and which are not fit to be named amongst Christians. To which may be added, the horrid crime of self-murder, not only frequently practised, but pleaded for: a practice deservedly rendered infamous by our laws, as being a murder committed by a man upon his own person, in opposition not only to the most sacred obligations of religion, and the rights of the community, but to the strongest instincts of the human nature, wisely implanted in us by the great Author of our beings, as a bar to such monstrous practices.—To all which may be added, that barbarous practice of men's murdering one another, upon a pretended point of honour, as it is called, for the most slight and trivial offences, below the cognizance of our laws. A crime inexcusable in a civilized country, and which yet generally passes unpunished, and thus leaves the guilt of blood upon the land, crying aloud for vengeance.—It is impossible for a thinking man, that has a true zeal for the honour of God and the interests of religion and virtue, and who hath the welfare and happiness of his country really at heart, not to be deeply affected with such a view of things, and solicitous what the consequence may prove.

And now it is a natural inquiry, what can this be owing to? Whence can it be, that nations so happily privileged, and favoured with so many advantages for the knowledge and practice of religion, should have sunk into such an amazing corruption and degeneracy? Can this be consistently charged on religion itself, either the Christian religion or the Protestant, which is the religion of Jesus, as taught in the holy scriptures, and freed from the abuses and corruptions that have been brought into it? The deists have pretended the first, the enemies to the reformation the last. The answer to both is in effect the same. Can that be the cause of corruptions among Christians, which, if steadily adhered to, is the best remedy against those corruptions? Can that occasion an abounding in vice and wickedness, which, if really believed and seriously considered, exhibiteth the most powerful dissuasives from it that can enter into the human mind? Can the furnishing the people with the means of knowledge, and bringing them to an acquaintance with the holy scriptures, which are able to make us "wise unto salvation," and are "profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness," can this have any tendency to encourage them in vice and dissoluteness? Such a supposition is

worst of all evils, that ever befell unhappy man; to use their utmost endeavours to deliver mankind from the pest! But notwithstanding this astonishing ravage and destruction of the human species, yet the unhappy unrelenting nations of the world seem as unconcerned about it as if only so many thousands, nay millions, of caterpillars or locusts were destroyed thereby. Was there ever a more important occasion to rouse the indignation of mankind? Can we be calm and undisturbed, when this mighty destroyer rears up its envenomed head? The most zealous advocates for drams, even the unhappy besotted *dramists* themselves, the prolonging of whose lives, and whose real welfare, both here and hereafter, is hereby sincerely intended, cannot find fault with this well-meant remonstrance, in defence of them and of all mankind, against this universal destroyer, from one who has long been labouring, and that not without success, in finding means to preserve multitudes of lives by various means."

contrary to the plainest dictates of common sense. The corruption therefore complained of can never be the natural effect or product of our advantages, and especially of the religion we profess. On the contrary, the best and surest preservative against this growing corruption, and the most effectual way of recovering from it, would be to have a high esteem for those divine oracles, to read and consider them with attention, and to lay to heart the excellent instructions and directions which are there set before us.

There is a far more natural account to be given of that corruption of manners, that vice and wickedness which so much aboundeth among us. It is owing not to the knowledge or belief of religion, but to the neglect or contempt of it; to a strange indifference towards it in some, whilst others use their utmost endeavours to traduce and expose it under the vilifying characters of superstition, priestcraft, or enthusiasm. Great numbers of impious books have swarmed among us, both formerly and of late: some of which are not only levelled against Christianity, but strike at the foundations of all religion, the attributes and providence of God, and a future state of retribution. The manifest tendency of them has been to banish the fear of the Deity, to confound the moral differences of things, to degrade the human nature to a level with the brutes, and thereby extinguish every noble and generous sentiment, to deprive good men of the blessed hope of immortality, and to free bad men from the fears of future punishments, and the apprehensions of a supreme Governor and Judge. These principles, and the books that contain them, have been propagated with great eagerness and industry, both in these kingdoms, and in our plantations abroad, and sometimes at a considerable expence. This preposterous kind of zeal for infidelity may, to a considerate observer, seem to be an odd phenomenon, of which no rational account can be given. One may, in some degree, account for a man's being hurried away by the violence of his appetites and passions, to do what his own mind disapproves and condemns: but that any man should coolly take pains to set other men loose from all the restraints of religion and conscience, and thereby, as far as in him lies, attempt to dissolve the bands of society and public order, and encourage men to gratify and fulfil their appetites and passions without controul, the natural consequence of which would be to introduce universal confusion, in which he himself may be a great sufferer, is absolutely unaccountable on any principles of good sense or sound policy; so that, if we did not see frequent instances of it, we should be apt to think it scarcely possible that any men in their senses should act so strange a part.

One very pernicious consequence of such open attempts against religion is, the spreading profaneness and dissoluteness of manners among the *lower* kind of people, who easily catch the contagion, when once men of *higher degree*, or at least that pretend to a superior sagacity, have set the example. And who can, without deep concern, observe, that this is very much become the case among us at present? Great numbers of those who belong to what ought to

be the most industrious body of the people, are sunk into irreligion and vice : and in proportion as these prevail, they become averse to all honest labour and industry, and prone to the most flagitious crimes, which have the worst effect imaginable on the peace and good order of the community. And it is easy to see what mischief and confusion must thence ensue. A sober and industrious populace is the strength, the riches, the glory of a nation : but when those, that should be the labouring hands, become vicious and dissolute, they are prepared for every kind of wickedness and disorder. As, from their rank and education, they have, for the most part, little regard to the appearances of honour and decency, if at the same time they have cast off the ties of religion, and the fear of God, and a regard to the powers of the world to come, and are abandoned to their appetites and passions, what are they not capable of ? It is an observation which hath generally held, and is verified by the experience of all ages, that "righteousness exalteth a nation, but sin (i. e. abounding vice and wickedness) is a reproach unto any people" (i. e. it bringeth disgrace and misery upon them), Prov. xiii. 10. When once a neglect of religion and a corruption of manners become general, they have a natural tendency to dissolve and enervate a nation, and to extinguish true public spirit and a manly fortitude. Nor have any people long maintained their liberties, after having lost their probity and virtue.

Thus it is in the natural course of things, and thus it also is by the just judgment of God, and according to the stated rules of the divine procedure towards nations or large communities. God may indeed, in his great wisdom and goodness, long bear with a degenerate people, and may even continue to pour forth many blessings upon them when they are in a corrupt state, especially if there be a considerable remnant of good men still to be found among them. But when their iniquities are grown up to such a height, and have continued so long, that he doth not see fit to bear with them any longer, the measure of their iniquities is said to be full ; the time is come for executing a severe vengeance upon them, and the punishment falls heavier for being so long delayed.

Whosoever duly considereth these things will be apt to think, that, according to the ordinary method of God's providential dealings towards backsliding nations and churches, we have too much reason to apprehend his righteous judgments. The present situation of things hath an alarming appearance, and, if we be not utterly stupid, must tend to awaken us out of our security. Scarcely ever was there a time in which it might be more justly said, that "God's judgments are abroad in the earth." I need not enter into particulars : they are very well known, and fresh in our remembrance. There have been, to use our Saviour's emphatical expressions, "commotions and great earthquakes in divers places,—distress of nations with perplexity, the sea and the waves roaring : men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things that shall come upon the earth," Luke xxi. 9. 11. 25. Of so vast an extent have the amazing concussions been, reaching to many parts of Europe,

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learn righteousness;" i. e. they ought to do so; and it is the natural tendency of such judgments to engage them to do so. The calamities inflicted upon others should be regarded by us as solemn warnings and admonitions, which it highly concerneth us to improve. The language of such dispensations to all that hear of them, is the same with that of our Saviour to the Jews, when speaking of those persons on whom the tower of Siloam fell, and of those whose blood Pilate mingled with their sacrifices, "Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish." Luke xiii. 3. 5. How inexcusable shall we therefore be, if, instead of laying these things seriously to heart, we continue careless and unaffected still, and go on in a thoughtless round of gaieties and pleasures, like those the prophet mentions, Is. v. 12. "The harp and the viol, the tabret and pipe, and wine are in their feasts: but they regard not the work of the Lord, neither consider the operation of his hands." Against such persons a solemn woe is there denounced. And elsewhere, speaking of some who continued to indulge themselves in luxury and riot, and all kinds of sensual mirth, at a time when the circumstances of things called for deep humiliation and repentance, he saith, "It was revealed in mine ears by the Lord of hosts, Surely this iniquity shall not be purged from you till ye die, saith the Lord God of hosts." Is. xxii. 12, 13, 14.

Whosoever carefully observeth the course of the divine dispensations towards us for some time past, will be sensible that we have had many warnings given us. A pestilence amongst the cattle in England for many years past, and though abated, still continues in some parts of this country. But a few years ago the sword of war raged in one part of the united kingdom of Great Britain, and was near penetrating to the centre of it, and threatened the subversion of that constitution, on which the preservation of our religion, laws, and liberties, in a great measure dependeth: but, through the great goodness of God, our fears were, after some time, happily dispelled. More lately encroachments have been made upon our possessions and plantations abroad, in which our national safety and prosperity is very nearly interested. And now it is not many weeks since a most dreadful calamity hath befallen a kingdom, so very nearly connected with us in interest and alliance, that the calamity may be regarded as, in a considerable degree, our own. And in fact, we have been and are great sufferers by it. Many lives have been lost of his Majesty's subjects belonging to Great Britain and Ireland, and many more there are, who, by the sudden subversion, have either been totally, or in a considerable degree, deprived of their worldly substance, and reduced to circumstances of distress. A present stop is put to the course of a most advantageous commerce. The springs of our wealth are obstructed; a great blow is struck at our trade, in which we are so apt to place our confidence: and this at the very time when we seem to be entering upon a war with a mighty nation, a war that threatens to be very hazardous, and which must needs put us to a vast expence, which we are not very well able to bear. That particular judgment, under which some of

Africa, and America, at a great distance from one another, and in divers places have produced such dreadful effects, even to the subversion of great and populous cities, that it looketh as if God were about some great and remarkable work of judgment, "to punish the world for their evil, and the wicked for their iniquities," as the prophet expresseth it, *Is. xiii. 11*. Surely every man, who believeth that there is a Providence which extendeth its care to mankind, must believe that it hath a special concernment in events of such a nature, which so nearly affect nations and large communities, and on which the lives and fortunes of so many thousands depend. Though second causes are admitted, still it must be considered, that they are all under the direction and superintendence of God's sovereign providence, which so ordereth and over-ruleth the circumstances of things, and the course of natural causes, as to subserve the ends of his moral administration with regard to his reasonable creatures, and to execute his purposes towards them, whether in a way of judgment or of mercy. And, in every such case, we should fix our views not merely or principally on second causes, but should look above them to the supreme Disposer, and endeavour to comport with the designs of his infinite wisdom and righteousness. Calamitous events of a public nature are not to be considered as concerning only the particular persons or people that immediately suffer by them. They have a more extensive view, and are designed and fitted to give instructive lessons to all mankind that hear them. The natural tendency of all such dispensations is to awaken in the minds of men a holy fear of the divine Majesty, and to give them a most affecting conviction of the vanity and instability of all worldly hopes and dependencies. The prophet *Isaiah*, after having described in a very lively manner the striking impressions that should be made upon the hearts of men because of "the fear of the Lord, and the glory of his Majesty, when he ariseth to shake terribly the earth," very properly adds, "Cease ye from man whose breath is in his nostrils: for wherein is he to be accounted of? *Is. xi. 20, 21*. Of what avail, in such a time of awful visitation, are the arts of human policy, the pomp of courts, or the power of mighty armies, or the riches and grandeur of the most populous and magnificent cities? The plain voice of such dispensations, a voice intelligible to all mankind, is this: "Let all the earth fear the Lord: let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of him." *Psal. xxxiii. 8*. "The Lord is the true God, he is the living God, and an everlasting King: at his wrath the earth shall tremble; and the nations shall not be able to abide his indignation. *Jer. x. 10*. Surely we should be ready to cry out on such occasions, "Great and marvellous are thy works, Lord God Almighty, just and true are thy ways, thou King of saints. Who would not fear thee, and glorify thy name? for thou only art holy. For all nations shall come and worship before thee: for thy judgments are made manifest." *Rev. xv. 3, 4*. The great use which is to be made of such awful dispensations, is well expressed by the prophet *Isaiah*, *xxvi. 9*. "When thy judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world will

to the use of all proper means which human prudence may suggest. But still we must get this fixed upon our minds, that whatever projects may be formed for procuring national advantages, and promoting the public prosperity, all other expedients to make a people flourish, without reformation of manners, and without the knowledge and practice of religion and public virtue, however they may seem to have an effect for a while, will, in the issue, prove ineffectual and vain.

The most proper way we can take to avert impending judgments, to preserve and maintain our valuable privileges, and promote the public welfare and happiness, is not to express a clamorous zeal for liberty at the same time that we abuse it to an unrestrained licentiousness, than which nothing hath a greater tendency, both through the righteous judgment of God, and in the nature of the thing, to deprive us of our liberties; but it is to endeavour to make a just and wise improvement of our advantages, to maintain a strict regard to *religion, probity, and purity of manners*, and to guard against *vice, libertinism, profaneness, and debauchery*. This, and this alone, will preserve us a free, a flourishing, and happy people. God grant that this may be the blessing of these nations to the latest posterity; and that we may long enjoy the light of the glorious gospel of Christ shining among us in its genuine purity, and the inestimable advantage of a freedom to profess it, and to worship God according to the directions of his word, and the dictates of our own consciences, without being exposed to persecuting rage and violence! Happy nations that we still are! if we be but duly sensible of our happiness! and careful to make a right use of our privileges! What a glorious face of things would soon appear among us, if, as we have the best religion in the world, we took care to govern ourselves by its sacred rules, and to act under the influence of its divine instructions and important motives! Virtue, supported and animated by the glorious hopes of the gospel, would appear in its genuine sacred charms, and in its lovely beauty and excellence. Love, the true spirit of Christianity, would prevail, and produce a mutual forbearance in lesser differences, at the same time that there would be a happy agreement in matters of the highest importance; there would be a zeal without bigotry, a liberty without licentiousness. The natural consequence of all this would be peace and harmony in larger and lesser societies. Such would be the face of things among us, as far as could be expected in this state of imperfection, if the religion of Jesus were firmly believed, and duly considered, and men would be more generally persuaded to give up themselves to its divine conduct. This would render persons in high stations signally useful to the public, and ornaments as well as supports to their country. And at the same time *sobriety, industry, temperance, and good order*, would spread among the body of the people. Nor would *true bravery and fortitude* be wanting. For though *superstition* tendeth to produce *mean and unmanly fears, true religion*, and a *steady belief* of a *wise and righteous Providence*, hath a tendency to fortify and establish the mind, and to

produce a real *courage* and *greatness of soul*, which will enable a man to meet death with a calm intrepidity in a noble and just cause, and stand the shock of the greatest terrors.

It is a reflection which hath frequently occurred to my mind, especially on occasion of the late dreadful judgments of God, how different, under the apprehension or pressure of an amazing calamity, must be the state of *one* that firmly believeth Christianity, and endeavoureth to govern his practice by its excellent rules, from that of the atheist and unbeliever, or of the man who, though he professeth to believe the Christian religion, liveth in a plain contradiction to its sacred obligations. The former, however black and disastrous the face of things may appear to be, which naturally tend to create fears in the human mind, yet is persuaded, that all things are under the direction of infinite wisdom, righteousness, and goodness, and that we live in a world where every thing, above, beneath, and on every side of us, is in the hand of God, and under the direction of his Providence; who, as he can arm all his creatures against us, and make them the instruments of his just displeasure; so, if we be careful to please him, and approve ourselves in his sight, can make the whole creation around us to be as it were in a covenant of peace and friendship with us. Or, if a good man be involved in the same outward calamities with others, as must often, without a miracle, be expected, in calamities which happen to large communities, still he hath this to support him, that the great Lord of the universe is his father and his friend, and will cause those outward evils to turn, in the final issue, to his greatest benefit. Death itself, if this shall befall him, shall prove a real gain to him, and shall introduce him to a better world, and a nobler society. It is justly observed concerning the "man that feareth the Lord, that delighteth greatly in his commandments, that he shall not be afraid of evil tidings, his heart is fixed, trusting in the Lord, Psal. cxi. 1. 7. Not only may he say, upon good grounds, with the Psalmist, "The Lord is on my side, I will not fear: what can man do unto me?" Psal. cxviii. 6. And again, "Though an host should encamp against me, my heart shall not fear; though war should rise against me, in this will I be confident, Psal. xxvii. 2. But he may break forth into that noble strain of triumph, "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea: though the waters thereof roar and be troubled, and though the mountains shake with the swelling thereof," Psal. xli. 1, 2, 3. On the other hand the wicked and ungodly man, continuing such, hath no proper resource, no solid comfort or support in a day of calamity, when all things seem black and dismal about him. For either he looketh upon them to be the effects of a *wild chance*, or *blind necessity*, which cannot possibly be the object of a rational trust and confidence, and which leaves no room for hope, but in that which nature hath an abhorrence of, an utter extinction of being: or, he apprehendeth them to be the just judgments of the wise and righteous governor of the world, whom he hath offended

by his sins. And vain it is to brave it against the wrath of heaven. Not to fear creatures like ourselves, in a just cause, argueth a noble and manly fortitude : but not to fear God, the Almighty Lord of the universe, is not courage, but madness. The only proper thing which remaineth for such persons to do, and it is what reason, as well as Scripture, directeth to, is to humble themselves deeply under the mighty hand of God, and to flee to his infinite mercy, through Jesus Christ, in a hearty compliance with the most reasonable and gracious terms which he hath appointed, for obtaining an interest in his grace and favour.

Upon the whole, the best thing that can be wished for the honour of God, for the happiness of mankind, and for the real welfare of our country, is, that a hearty zeal for the knowledge and practice of our holy religion may have a revival among us ; and that persons of all orders and conditions may join in contributing to promote its sacred interests. And notwithstanding the corruption too justly complained of, there are many, I am persuaded, among us, and may the number of them daily increase ; who are earnestly desirous to do this. Every man hath it in his power to contribute something towards it, at least by endeavouring to "walk in a conversation becoming the gospel." But there are some persons who have peculiar advantages for doing honour and service to Christianity. Those especially that are distinguished by their *high rank*, their *fortune*, and *quality*, should make use of the influence this gives them for recommending and promoting true religion and virtue, which will add a lustre to their *titles*, and *dignities*, and is one of the best ways they can take to show their regard to the public happiness. Magistrates should account it their duty and their honour to employ the authority they are invested with, for serving the interests of religion, and discountenancing vice and wickedness ; since for this purpose they are appointed, that they "may be for the punishment of evil-doers, and for the praise of them that do well." And it is then that their authority will have its proper influence, when it is strengthened by that of their own good example. But, above all, they who are honoured with the character of the *ministers* of the holy Jesus should make it the very business of their lives to spread and promote real vital Christianity, to instruct the people in its important doctrines, and build them up in their most holy faith, and to enforce upon them the excellent duties it enjoins, by all the powerful and most engaging motives which the gospel sets before us. And that their instructions may have the proper effect, it highly concerneth them to keep themselves free from the *fashionable vices* and *follies* of the age, and to endeavour to be ensamples to their flocks, by a well tempered zeal, piety and charity, and the virtues of a holy life. Thus will they not only do the highest service to religion, but procure the greatest honour to themselves, and the most just veneration for their sacred character, which, where it is not disgraced by a conduct unworthy of it, naturally demandeth the esteem and regard of all the true friends to religion and virtue.

For these valuable and excellent purposes, may the God of all

grace pour forth his Holy Spirit upon all orders and degrees of men in these nations, that, as they bear the honourable name of Christians, they may "adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things; and, being filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding, may walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing; being fruitful in every good work."

I may be thought perhaps to have insisted too largely upon these things. But I cannot but think, that one of the principal things which ought to be proposed in books written in defence of Christianity, should be not merely to promote the speculative belief of it, but to engage men to that which is the main design of its excellent doctrines, as well as precepts—a holy and a virtuous practice.

APPENDIX,

CONTAINING

A VIEW OF THE PRESENT TIMES,

WITH REGARD TO RELIGION AND MORALS.

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APPENDIX.

Containing a View of the present Times, with regard to Religion and Morals.—Reflections suggested by that View.—An Illustration of the excellent Tendency of Christianity to promote even temporal, and particularly, national Happiness.—An Enforcement of the Necessity of a general Reformation of Manners.—And Cautions against the Poison of Infidelity.

INTRODUCTION.

THE principles, contained in the preceding Appendix, are not only just and salutary in themselves, but have been singularly illustrated and enforced by the events which have happened on the grand theatre of human affairs, since it was written. As the consideration of these events, and of the most prominent causes which have produced them, must strongly tend to awake the dormant attention of mankind to religious concerns, and, particularly, to the great and important doctrines of Christianity, it appears highly proper at this time, and on occasion of a new edition of Leland's most excellent work, to take a cursory view of the awful dispensations of divine Providence which a short course of years has exhibited to an astonished world, and to bestow some serious reflection on the principles and conduct which they so strongly inculcate on all ranks and conditions of men. This shall be the chief subject of this additional Appendix. Its comprehensive nature, its intimate connexion with the highest interests of mankind, and its peculiar relation to the present times, would demand both a fuller discussion than is compatible with the limits of this paper, and greater abilities than the writer of it pretends to possess. Such, however, as it is, it may do some good, and with this view solely it was composed.

The considerations now to be presented to the reader, arise directly from the contemplation of the present state of Europe, and those striking convulsions and revolutions which it exhibits. Religion, not politics, is the writer's object. But, as religious concerns have been strongly affected by political agitations, and as an irreligious spirit has much contributed to produce the most dreadful calamities of the times, it is necessary, to the end in view, to direct a considerable portion of attention to the political world, and to survey its most remarkable appearances.

That the gross corruptions of Christianity, which have so long prevailed in countries called Christian, have, on the one hand, powerfully contributed to the rejection of all religious principle, and to

the dreadful disorders which this has occasioned, will not be questioned by any person of discernment who is, in the smallest degree, acquainted with the present, and preceding, state of these countries. On the other hand, the uncertain speculations of pretended philosophy, in contempt of the sure and salutary dictates of divine truth, even in countries where access is opened to the best sources of religious information, have been productive of the most fatal consequences to morals, and to the happiness of civil society, which rests on no other foundation, but public and private virtue. Pure and genuine Christianity, unknown or despised, has failed to produce its blessed fruits on the earth. Its shadow and external form only have been preserved among the greater part of Christian nations; and, even among those where its substance is to be found, its pure instructions, its power, its spirit, and its practice, are confined within very narrow bounds, while dissipation, immorality, and unrestrained licentiousness, reign through the greater part of the community. The time is now come when the *judgments of God in the earth* are proclaimed with such a loud and terrific voice, that they must rouse the most inattentive, convince the most prejudiced, and, one should also think, bend the most obdurate to *learn righteousness*. In order to impress this awful truth more strongly on the reader's mind, it will be proper to consider the principal events of the present time; to attend to the instruction which they convey; and to show the admirable tendency of the Christian religion to promote even the temporal happiness of mankind.

SECTION I.

Of the present Aspect of the Times.

WITHIN the space of a few years, wonderful, and almost incredible changes have happened on the great theatre of the world. The American revolution was not only extremely important in itself, but has been productive of a series of astonishing events. The principle, on which the American republic claimed and established its independence, attracted universal attention. The foundations of civil society, the natural rights of man, and the reciprocal duties of rulers and subjects, were universally discussed; and, in the course of the discussion, views and opinions with respect to the political and civil condition of mankind, to which the generality of men had, hitherto, been strangers, were spread as far as the influence of the press could extend. Unhappily the greater part of European governments had equally departed from the principles of the religion they professed, and from those eternal maxims of justice by which every government ought to be directed, and substituted, in the place of these, the dictates of the most crooked and insidious policy. Corruption, beginning at the head, had diffused its baneful contagion through the

whole social body. Although mankind were almost everywhere panting for liberty, they were little qualified for its enjoyment, which can be obtained only in conjunction with that morality which directs freedom to its proper ends, and prevents it from degenerating into the grossest licentiousness.

One of the most corrupt courts of Europe was certainly that of France. Its unvarying aim had, for ages, been its own aggrandizement; and the means, which it employed for this purpose, were either craft, or violence, as the one or the other appeared most conducive to the immediate object in view. Actuated solely by that policy which dictated the diminution of a rival's power, this court, as regardless of the dangers which threatened itself, as it was indifferent to the principles of liberty, embraced the American cause, and powerfully contributed to its triumph.

The same policy led to foment discontents and dissensions in other countries, and to undertake the defence of schemes of government the reverse of those by which its own administration was conducted. How short-sighted, how weak is the deepest policy of man! What, in the view of those, who pursued these plans, appeared the most penetrating sagacity, and the most comprehensive wisdom, turned out, to them, the most egregious folly, and the most fatal delusion.

The arts that were then practised, the pretexts that were employed, the writings that were disseminated, the armies and the fleets that were sent out to accomplish the designs of the French government—all contributed to diffuse, through France, political opinions, and a national spirit unknown to it before. That flagrant abuses in almost every department of the state; scandalous dilapidations of public treasure; the consequent derangement of finance; the want of regular resources to supply the deficiency; the impotence of royal power to procure extraordinary ones without some appearance of national consent; the impious attacks against not only every form and description of revealed, but even the fundamental principles of natural religion, contained in the most admired and popular writings; and the libertinism and dissolution of manners universally diffused, but particularly prevalent in the higher classes of society—that all these circumstances had prepared the French nation for some portentous and wide-extending revolution cannot be called in question.

Its beginnings, indeed, wore a smiling appearance, and afforded a pleasing prospect of public felicity. Those who wished well to mankind, and ardently desired more equitable and beneficent plans of public administration to be universally adopted, easily cherished the delightful expectation of a happier era beginning to dawn upon Europe.

But, in this expectation, it is evident that they rather indulged the representation of benevolent fancy, than consulted the calm dictates of rational anticipation. It could not reasonably be supposed that a nation of such levity of character, of such ardent and impetuous passions, and so corrupted by luxury, and still more by irre-

ligion, would, when set free from those restraints to which it had so long been subject, remain within any bounds of moderation. Scenes of tremendous desolation ought, at all events, to have been expected. It was impossible, also, in the nature of things, that the violent agitations of France should not, in some way or other, affect every neighbouring state, and ultimately extend their convulsive influence to the remotest parts of Europe.

The Jacobin faction, the most desperate and profligate mentioned in history, speedily spread, through their own country, confusion, anarchy, and every species of unbridled licentiousness, trampled under foot every feeling and sentiment of humanity, confounded every moral distinction, and invested, with the badges of honour, the most detestable forms of criminality. These men had seen, in the writings of pretended philosophers, the grossest corruptions of Christianity exposed as the genuine doctrines of our holy faith. They had seen the virulent persecutions, which these corruptions, in subservience to the most iniquitous passions of the human breast, had occasioned, imputed to a religion which breathes universal charity and kindness, and prepares man for heaven by rendering him beneficent and virtuous on earth. They had seen its purest precepts, which soar far above morality merely human, represented as impracticable, or pernicious. They had learned to consider every real Christian as a fanatic, and to class every species of religion with superstition and hypocrisy. Rejecting Christianity, therefore, as a fable, they resolved to extirpate it wherever their power might extend, and, with a spirit of freedom disdaining submission even to infinite wisdom, goodness, and power, to dethrone, in idea, the Sovereign of the universe. Pretending to wage war with fanaticism, they exhibited it in a form and shape unknown and unconceived before—the fanaticism of atheism, the burning zeal of impiety, the sublimated spirit of political intolerance.

Now, for the first time, was displayed, to the world, the spectacle of a legislative body renouncing all regard for religion, and openly proclaiming, as the perfection of wisdom, the disbelief of a Deity and of a future state. The strongest ties by which mankind are bound, and the most powerful motives by which they are influenced to the practice of virtue, were, under the sanction of avowed principle, broken and destroyed, and what reason itself had established, on the strongest foundations, was considered as the reverie of disordered fancy.

So nearly, however, are extremes allied, that, in the midst of this flagrant renunciation of all religious principle, the open profession and practice of idolatry and polytheism were adopted. Those, who disclaimed the religion of Christ, and the worship of God, erected altars to the imaginary goddess of liberty, and to the deified personification of their country, and attempted to revive the absurd religious ceremonies of Greece and Rome. So that, among all the other extravagancies of the present age, was exhibited the inconsistent union of atheism, and superstition, while each of these discordant principles counteracted the effect of the other; atheism pre-

venting superstition from affording any check to the crimes of its professors, and superstition inspiring that fanatical rage which atheism pretends to prevent—An appearance of delusion and frenzy hitherto unexampled in the annals of the world.

As this frantic spirit endeavoured to propagate its tenets through every surrounding nation, and to overturn every established form of government, it was not surprising that princes and states should combine to resist it; and, if ever there was a time, when mutual interest dictated mutual and cordial co-operation, and the abandonment of all narrow, partial, and selfish views, it was surely that in which the coalition was formed against the torrent of the French anarchical system. But, the reverse of all this took place. The Continental powers were united by no principle of common welfare. They were actuated by no regard for the happiness either of their own subjects, or of mankind in general. That old system of crooked and narrow politics, by which the cabinets of Europe have been too much influenced for two hundred years backwards, dictated their measures, and directed the whole of their proceedings. Each sought only some little acquisition of territory, of treasure, or of power. Their subsequent conduct justified the imputations of their enemies; and while they professed to stop the torrent of impiety, anarchy, and cruelty, they contributed to its more extensive and rapid course. What has been the result? Their feeble and ill-concerted opposition has afforded, to a power the most enterprising and dangerous that has appeared in the world since the times of ancient Rome, all that advantage which attends the splendour and the dread of victory; and, while their weakness has removed every restraint of fear, they have lost that respect which would, at least, have been attached to principle. The fiends of war have been let loose to ravage and desolate Europe; poverty, distress, bloodshed, and almost every species of misery have been widely extended, with no other effect, but that of augmenting that very evil, the prevention or diminution of which was to have been the sole compensation of such immediate calamities. Wherever we turn our view, nothing is presented but the most melancholy subjects of contemplation.

We behold the strongest bonds of society burst asunder over a considerable part of Christendom, the tenderest charities of nature trodden under foot, impiety, blasphemy, and atheism stalking on the earth with daring front, and bidding defiance to the thunder of the Almighty. We behold a nation, esteemed one of the most civilized of Europe, stained with deeds of barbarity by which the most ferocious savages would have deemed themselves disgraced. We behold the wild and impious leaders of that nation, not content with having deluged its fields and its streets with the blood of thousands of victims sacrificed to fear, to revenge, or to wanton cruelty; with having depopulated and laid waste its cities, dissolved all social order, and extinguished, in the breasts of their countrymen, all true sense of justice, humanity, and religion, successfully employed in spreading the same confusion and misery through every other nation

to which they can extend their power. We behold some of the principal Sovereigns of Europe now trembling before the gigantic French Republic, eagerly courting reconciliation with her, joining in the bands of amity with those whom they had proclaimed the most atrocious malefactors, and, in order to compensate the losses they have sustained in the contest, in which they have been engaged, adopting those very schemes of invasion of their weaker neighbours, which in her they had so strongly reprobated. We behold two powerful states deprived of political existence, and divided by the hand of rapine,* and others stripped of half their possessions. We see our own country almost exhausted by a bloody, expensive, and exasperated war; and although, by the divine undeserved mercy, we have, hitherto, been preserved from that confusion, disorder, and ruin which have overwhelmed other nations, we are uncertain how long this advantage may be continued.

Never before did modern Europe experience a more dreadful concussion—a concussion already productive of the greatest changes, and announcing still greater, and more numerous. For, the fermentation, which everywhere agitates the minds of men, cannot soon subside. Passions, so strongly, and so generally excited, must, like water which has burst every bank and mound that contained it, spread their inundations far and wide, till they, at last, find their own level. Notwithstanding the general desire, and, acknowledged necessity of peace to all Europe, there is little probability of its complete restoration, and still less, of its continuance, for a series of succeeding years. From this country the insolence and injustice of its enemies have removed all hopes of pacification for the present. The spirit of conquest, and of universal dominion appears evidently to have seized the present rulers of France. Peace is contrary both to their immediate possession of power, and to their exorbitant schemes of aggrandizement, nor till these are completely and irretrievably frustrated, are there any hopes of a general and permanent pacification.

The last general ferment which Christendom experienced was that which was occasioned by the reformation. Wars and rumours of wars did not subside for nearly a century after they commenced. It is true that all these commotions and calamities were ultimately productive of the greatest good both to the civil and religious interests of mankind. But, while human corruption is so deeply rooted, and so widely spread, it is hardly possible that correction, amendment, and final peace can be obtained without great and lasting severities. The ferment, which now exists, is, indeed, of a complexion very different from that just stated. It is merely political, and strongly irreligious. But, it is a great and extensive ferment, and must produce effects adequate to its force and diffusion.

Now, if these are not the *judgments of God in the earth*, when did they ever exist? When has his arm ever been more conspicuously

* Poland and Venice.

displayed, from the clouds, wielding the threatening sword, to impress, on the inhabitants of the world, the long forgotten lessons of *righteousness*? These judgments are not to be confounded with the more doubtful ones of hurricanes, earthquakes, tempests, or inundations, which, though adapted to rouse men to reflection, and to a serious review of their moral state, spring not immediately from human depravity, and bear not along with them the distinct impressions of moral evil. The judgments, which now afflict mankind, can all be traced back to the most polluted sources of corruption, and, originating in the profligacy of the higher stations of society, have diffused their contagion through the whole social mass. "From the sole of the foot even to the head, there is no soundness in it; but wounds and bruises and putrifying sores."* "It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not."†

The love of money, *the root of all evil*, is universally predominant. The commercial spirit, laudable, indeed, and salutary, when restrained within due bounds, and regulated by the principles of piety and morality, now appears to absorb every other consideration, to prescribe the most extensive gain as the measure of public interest, to extinguish the genuine love of country, and to eradicate all sense of national honour. The masculine, elevated, and wise sentiments of our ancestors seem to have given place to a sordid desire, and an ignoble veneration, of wealth, to an intemperate love of pleasure, to wasting luxury, and to all the frivolity and effeminacy of a luxurious and opulent age. Dissipation and profanity are no longer confined to the higher ranks, where they long resided, but have descended to the lower, aggravated by all that coarseness of excess which always accompanies a mean education. Among them, the doctrines of infidelity have also been disseminated with a facility of reception which would, a few years ago, have been accounted impossible. Never before were those conjugal ties, the sanctity of which is the surest pledge of purity of morals and of public happiness, so wantonly broken; never was domestic felicity so frequently stabbed, and all that people owe to their children and families, so shamefully neglected or forgotten; never was there a period in which religion was so little studied, in theory, and so little manifested in practice; in so much, that it appears to be the only subject which ought not to occupy people's thoughts, and the only principle that ought not to influence their conduct. Even when any regard for religion remains, how often does it degenerate either into bigotry or fanaticism, or into mere external observance, and a respect for public institutions? The small influence of genuine piety is evident from this circumstance, that it very frequently happens, that persons, who are uncommonly zealous for a particular system of religious opinions, are by no means affected by the attempts of deists or atheists to sap the foundations of all religion both natural and revealed, and even ap-

* Isaiah i. 6.

† Lament. iii. 22.

plaud their pernicious doctrines, merely because they agree with them on certain political points. Can this be called anything else but an obstinate sectarian spirit, devoid of all pure religious principle? Public spirit is generally either a blind attachment to party, or an invincible devotion to opinions adverse to rational freedom, and good government, either by their tendency to despotic oppression, or to democratical anarchy. Thanks be to God! for the remnant of virtue that is still preserved among us, in the humanity and charity which characterize our nation, and, in some measure, redeem the manifold turpitude by which it is disgraced.

After this view of the calamities and the vices of the present times, of the events which have so recently happened, and of that peculiar aspect of the world, which admits of no other solution but that of an extraordinary appointment of divine providence, to punish the sins of men, to reprove, in particular, the decay of religion, and to warn us to return, before it be too late, to her forsaken paths, it will now be proper to collect the instruction, which the judgments of God, so loudly proclaimed, are evidently calculated to convey.

SECTION II.

The religious and moral Instruction dictated by the present awful State of the Christian World.

I. It is clear that divine Providence is prosecuting some great and extensive plan in this lower world. What its peculiar nature may be, it would be rash and presumptuous to determine. But, with a desire of moral and religious improvement, it certainly becomes us to attend to the most striking features of the divine dispensations, as far as they can be discerned by our feeble and clouded sight. Every thing, now happening on the great theatre of human affairs, is extraordinary and repugnant to the experience of ages immediately preceding. An attentive eye, however, may easily discover, in these events, the progress of overruling wisdom, and the decisions of sovereign justice—A people, extremely corrupt and irreligious, has been let loose to scourge the greatest potentates of the earth: and, as their policy was chiefly derived from the French school, and the libertinism, which they encouraged both by their precept and example, also flowed from the same source; so has this been the very quarter from which their humiliation and their sufferings have proceeded. The attempts of despotism to check the rising spirit of liberty, and to crush it for ever, have completely failed. Her sceptre has been broken by the blow by which she intended to intimidate mankind. The great ones of the earth have received impressive admonitions, in the fate of the nobility and privileged orders of France.

to beware of abusing their distinctions and advantages, and of provoking the indignation of mankind, by their pride, their profligacy, and their irreligion. The writings of sceptical and infidel authors were chiefly admired and recommended in the higher spheres of life. Many persons in these ranks were pleased with them, because they set them free from moral and religious obligations. What their depravity led them to wish, their ignorance prepared them to receive as truth. From them the admiration of these writings, and the adoption of their pernicious sentiments, descended through the other orders of society, till the contagion of impiety, universally diffused, prepared the French nation for the reception of those shocking doctrines, which have produced the most dreadful disasters, of which the severity has chiefly fallen on the higher stations.* On the other hand, the popish hierarchy, and all its absurd and corrupting systems of superstition and intolerance have been overturned, not only in France, but in other countries, and a way opened for destroying them in those where they still appear to be firmly established.

Lest, however, greater evils than those which have been reprov'd and chastised, should be introduced; lest all moral distinctions should be confounded; lest blasphemy, atheism, atrocious cruelty, the most dreadful oppression, and every species and every degree of wickedness, should appear completely successful and triumphant; that very people, which has been used as the scourge of other nations and their princes, has endured, in a double measure, the calamities it has inflicted, and, in the midst of its external victories, suffers at home every description of national misery. Its streets have been deluged with the blood of their inhabitants, shed by their fellow citizens. The flames have consumed its villages and many of its towns, and the fields have been covered with dead bodies. Trade and manufactures annihilated, agriculture neglected, every source of national prosperity dried up, suspicion, jealousy, distrust, and revenge reign almost in every heart. Parties have risen upon parties; revolutions have succeeded revolutions; agitations and convulsions have never ceased. All the temporary leaders of factions have perished either by their own hands, or by those of the executioner, or by those of the assassin, or have been driven into exile. Even while I am writing, the last revolution has exhibited one of the most astonishing strokes of despotism that ever terrified mankind. Their most distinguished legislators, politicians, and warriors have, without form of trial, been sentenced to transportation, and sent off, in covered waggons, like so many wild beasts.

In all this, so extraordinary, so glaringly repugnant to the usual train of human affairs, may we not observe a peculiar direction of Providence, pursuing some grand and ultimately salutary plan? Do we not clearly perceive, that the impotence of despotism, un-

* See, in particular, the *Posthumous Works of the late King of Prussia*, abounding with the most poisonous infidelity, and the most virulent calumnies against the Christian religion, and its divine Author.

supported by the attachment and affection of subjects, has been exposed; the gross corruptions of Christianity have, in many places, been exploded; the folly, dissipation, and oppression of the elevated and opulent have received an alarming admonition: That, on the other hand, the calamities of unprincipled licentiousness, abusing the sacred name of liberty, the horrors of irreligious philosophy, and the devastations of anarchy and democratical tumult, have been presented to mankind in such a horrid and ghastly shape, that it is impossible the lesson can be soon forgotten: That, from the serious review of both sides of the picture, this conclusion must inevitably follow: that a government equally removed from anarchy and arbitrary power; that pure and undefiled religion, such as is inculcated by the sacred Scriptures; that justice, moderation, and condescension in high and wealthy stations; and contentment, industry, and a becoming respect for superiors in the lower classes of society, are the chief bonds of civil union, and the grand sources of public and private felicity; and that whatever, in either extreme, is repugnant to these, ought to be viewed with abhorrence, and repressed with vigour.

A general indifference for religion had begun to spread over Europe. Ashamed of superstition and bigotry, of fanaticism and intolerance, mankind were verging to the contrary extreme, and the flame of piety was fast expiring in every heart. Political, commercial, and economical subjects wholly engrossed the enquiries of philosophers, and constituted the chief study of those who devoted any part of their time to serious reading. Theology was no more attended to; and, even in protestant countries, the grossest ignorance of religious truth began to prevail. It was no disgrace for a man of education, who was not, by profession, a divine, to know nothing of the fundamental doctrines of the religion which he professed, of the discriminating articles of faith, discipline, and worship of the different churches into which Christians are divided, or of those evidences of divine original by which they concur in defending their religion against the attacks of deists. As for practice, how few, in any Christian country, thought of regulating their lives by the precepts of Christ, or allowed their plans of conduct to be influenced by their views of heaven!

Infidels, availing themselves of this neglect of religion, so generally prevalent, formed the design of extirpating every species and description of Christianity, and of putting their atheistical philosophy in its place. In the prosecution of this design, and of political schemes connected with it, the most atrocious actions have been committed, and the strongest sensations of horror impressed on every good and feeling heart. Mankind may now clearly see that fanatical excess is not peculiar to religious zeal, but accompanies other violent and outrageous passions, and that men may persecute from irreligious, as well as from religious, motives. Every impartial person, who will attend to the subject, must be convinced of the mild and beneficent tendency of Christianity. This conviction, when the natural effects of this religion are contrasted with those of prin-

ciples hostile to it, will come home to every mind with greater force. The spirit of piety may thus gradually revive; the Christian faith may be more respected and loved than it had been for a considerable period before. Of this there are already some indications. The higher ranks of society appear to be convinced how pernicious it is, even to their worldly interest, to spread through the community, that disregard for religion, which soon brings along with it a contempt for human authority. They begin to be more attentive to the external duties of religion; and, although this principle, as long as it is confined to appearances, is of little account in religious estimation, yet, what commences in fear and interest alone, if it superinduce serious and reflecting habits, may terminate in love, and the sincere practice of piety. Even that general agitation which prevails, although, at present, directed to political subjects, may also admit of religious impressions, if seasonably and forcibly applied. When men's minds are roused to exertion, they frequently grow disgusted with one subject of enquiry, and love to vary the channel of their activity. Total indifference to religion is unnatural to the human soul; and, when investigation, whatever be its immediate object, is once set on foot, a subject, of all the most important, can hardly fail to attract attention, whenever its light and evidence are allowed to shine without the interposing clouds of prejudice. Religious zeal appears, even now, to be rekindling for the extension of the gospel to heathen nations. The design is highly laudable in itself; but the more important and laudable any design is, the more necessary it is to conduct it with wisdom, a proper application of the most effectual means, and, on the grand principles of Christianity, unconfined by the distinctive tenets of parties and sects.* The subversion of the power of the Romish Church, over so large an extent of its former dominion, opens an extensive field for disseminating the original simplicity of the gospel, if protestants in those countries had but the zeal, and the courage to undertake it. That we have never heard of any attempt of this kind, is a lamentable proof of the decay of religious principle, where it might have been expected to retain some portion of vigour. While we so frequently hear of political communications; while republicanism and democracy are so prone to receive, and to impart, assistance; while the most important interests of the human race are alleged as the predominant motive; it is surprising that interests, far more important than any confined to this earth, should animate to no attempts to communicate the full light of gospel-truth, either to those who behold only its feeble glimmerings, or to those who turn away their eyes from it altogether. This is a species of fraternity unknown in our day, to which, however, the peculiar complexion of the times strongly invites. Nor can I help thinking that some of that zeal, labour, and expence, which is now engrossed by extending the gospel to heathen nations, might, with as great advantage, and as fair a prospect of

* How far this has been the case in the present instance, the issue will probably determine.

success, be employed in communicating, to those countries, in which the power of the Romish Church has been overturned, the unadulterated truths, and the pure morality of reformed Christianity.

Whatever be the ultimate object of the awful dispensations of divine Providence *now in the earth*, which no human foresight can, without presumption, pretend to discover, it is certain, that the reflections, above stated, are evidently dictated by them at present, and that, from these, considerable improvement in *righteousness* might be derived. In the midst of such impressive scenes, can we remain as indifferent, careless, and secure, as if the whole aspect of human affairs were illumined with the brightest sunshine, and invested with the most pleasing colours? Shall we not be brought to serious reflection both on our national, and private sins, which expose us to the divine vengeance, already displayed on every side of us, and endeavour, by sincere repentance and amendment, to avert from ourselves the calamities which have overwhelmed so many others, and which might also have justly fallen to our share, but for the undeserved mercy of God? Must it not become the most anxious wish, and most earnest care of every reflecting person, that he may not be taken off his guard, but be found *watching and sober*; that, though he should be stripped of every other possession, he may still retain *one treasure* which is subject to no corruption, and exposed to no violence or fraud; that, if he should be subject to "tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword," he may still retain the "love of Christ;" and that, if it should please God to inflict these severities upon him; either as trials, or as chastisements, he may not "lay on him more than he is able to bear," and direct his visitations more by his infinite mercy, than by the desert of the sufferer.

On the review of the scenes which the world, at present, exhibits, such reflections will unavoidably force themselves on the mind of every man who entertains any sense of religion. If they made that general impression, which they are certainly calculated to produce, the calamities, which have fallen to the share of so many of the human race, would not have been appointed in vain! We proceed to more particular reflections.

II. "The judgments of God now in the earth" loudly call on all civil rulers and magistrates, to keep constantly in view the public good, to acquire the most enlarged and comprehensive knowledge of it, to discharge their trust with the greatest integrity, and to conciliate obedience and attachment by the wisdom and benignity of their administration. Let them consider that their offices are instituted solely for the public benefit, that their talents and their labour ought to be devoted to this object, and that every neglect, much more every wilful violation, of duty is not only highly criminal in itself, but, in the present times, must unavoidably expose them to the severest reproach, if not to the most imminent danger.

It is the height of folly for any person, intrusted with the public administration, to pursue a crooked and selfish policy, in opposition to the most evident schemes of national advantage. The generality

of mankind are, at all times, apt to impute, to their governors, the most iniquitous and unjustifiable views. Of late years, they have grown uncommonly vigilant with regard to their conduct, and sharp-sighted in detecting its errors and defects. Sedition not only exaggerates real, but maliciously imputes fictitious, grounds of accusation. These calumnies must be refuted by a wise and benignant government. The experience of security, of increasing sources of prosperity, and of happiness, generally diffused, must impress, on the minds of the governed, the most conciliatory conviction; and the confusion, iniquity, and distress, produced by the absurd system of "outrageous liberty and tyrannical equality," must be contrasted with the pleasing display of order, of justice, and of the full enjoyment of every civil and political right, as far as is compatible with civil society. The days, when rank and office were illumined with the brightest lustre, are past. The atmosphere is overspread with clouds, and agitated with tempests. The gloom can be dissipated, and tranquillity restored, only by the steady and inextinguishable lights of beneficent talents, and of well-informed integrity.

The present times, in particular, inculcate, in the most impressive language, on princes, and rulers of every description, to encourage, protect, and advance the knowledge, and the practice of pure and undefiled religion, and of every useful and liberal science. Ignorance and prejudice are the great obstructors of national improvement. Genuine and substantial knowledge is the firmest support of lawful authority, the surest guard of order and peace, and the most certain pledge of dutiful submission to law, and to its constitutional administration. The conduct, which reason prescribes, religion still more powerfully enforces. A people, accustomed to free enquiry, and to that calm and steady investigation which leads to the discovery of truth, will not be easily misled by the false lights of atheistical philosophy, by the meteor glare of fanaticism, or by the funereal torch of superstition. These are soon eclipsed by the bright and steady sunshine of sound reason, and of revealed truth, which both discovers, and invigorates to pursue, the true road of happiness. Let it never be said that ignorance is the mother either of devotion, or of any thing good and valuable. Ignorance can confer no benefit, but a circumscribed capacity of doing evil. A person brutishly ignorant, is innocent, or useful, as far as he resembles an ox or a horse whose bodily strength may be usefully directed and applied by human intelligence. Even the value of inferior animals is increased in proportion to the sagacity and docility of their natures: and can it ever be maintained that ignorance and stupidity can be beneficial to any class or condition of men? Ignorance is the darkness of night which is as favourable to the approach of an enemy, as to our concealment from his view. Knowledge is the beneficent light of day, which, disclosing to us the surrounding objects in their true colours, and their just relations, enables us to pursue, or to avoid them, according to our circumstances. Ignorance is the insurmountable lot of brutes, and the temporary condition of infants. Knowledge is the acquisition of men, one glori-

success, be employed in communicating, to those countries, in which the power of the Romish Church has been overturned, the unadulterated truths, and the pure morality of reformed Christianity.

Whatever be the ultimate object of the awful dispensations of divine Providence *now in the earth*, which no human foresight can, without presumption, pretend to discover, it is certain, that the reflections, above stated, are evidently dictated by them at present, and that, from these, considerable improvement in *righteousness* might be derived. In the midst of such impressive scenes, can we remain as indifferent, careless, and secure, as if the whole aspect of human affairs were illumined with the brightest sunshine, and invested with the most pleasing colours? Shall we not be brought to serious reflection both on our national, and private sins, which expose us to the divine vengeance, already displayed on every side of us, and endeavour, by sincere repentance and amendment, to avert from ourselves the calamities which have overwhelmed so many others, and which might also have justly fallen to our share, but for the undeserved mercy of God? Must it not become the most anxious wish, and most earnest care of every reflecting person, that he may not be taken off his guard, but be found *watching and sober*; that, though he should be stripped of every other possession, he may still retain *one treasure* which is subject to no corruption, and exposed to no violence or fraud; that, if he should be subject to "tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword," he may still retain the "love of Christ;" and that, if it should please God to inflict these severities upon him; either as trials, or as chastisements, he may not "lay on him more than he is able to bear," and direct his visitations more by his infinite mercy, than by the desert of the sufferer.

On the review of the scenes which the world, at present, exhibits, such reflections will unavoidably force themselves on the mind of every man who entertains any sense of religion. If they made that general impression, which they are certainly calculated to produce, the calamities, which have fallen to the share of so many of the human race, would not have been appointed in vain! We proceed to more particular reflections.

II. "The judgments of God now in the earth" loudly call on all civil rulers and magistrates, to keep constantly in view the public good, to acquire the most enlarged and comprehensive knowledge of it, to discharge their trust with the greatest integrity, and to conciliate obedience and attachment by the wisdom and benignity of their administration. Let them consider that their offices are instituted solely for the public benefit, that their talents and their labour ought to be devoted to this object, and that every neglect, much more every wilful violation, of duty is not only highly criminal in itself, but, in the present times, must unavoidably expose them to the severest reproach, if not to the most imminent danger.

It is the height of folly for any person, intrusted with the public administration, to pursue a crooked and selfish policy, in opposition to the most evident schemes of national advantage. The generality

nations of the enemies of all order and distinction. Let those, therefore, who are raised in the scale of society, whether by birth or by riches, endeavour to command the respect, and to conciliate the benevolence of mankind by their reverence for religion, and by the practice of every social, civil, and domestic virtue. Let them be particularly careful in the education of their children, that they may qualify them to assert their hereditary honours, and to preserve their estates, which are, at present, exposed to such danger, on the one hand, by the vices of the great and wealthy, and by the licentiousness of the lower orders, on the other.

IV. The awful events of the present times convey an important lesson to the clergy. They exhort them, with the most impressive voice, to exert their utmost diligence, and their best abilities, to guard, from the contagion of impiety, and all its concomitant vices, those who are committed to their pastoral care. They warn them to try, by the standard of the Holy Scriptures, the doctrines which they teach, to see whether they be *really of God*, or the *tradition and commandments of men*. They exhibit to them infidelity and atheism, the children of corrupted religion, and of worldly policy, now employed in destroying their parents; and as they proclaim, that the *counsel of God cannot be overthrown*, and that *the gates of hell shall never prevail against the church of Christ*; so, they announce, that the counsel and the work of men, whenever they are inconsistent with the one and adverse to the other, will come to nought. The clergy are called upon to consider whether much of the impiety and profligacy of the present age is not occasioned by their indifference, their negligence, and, sometimes, by their attachment to worldly pleasures and preferments. Let them reflect, that if *the salt has lost its savour*, the corruption of the whole mass is unavoidable; that if those who should defend, preserve, and extend religion, are accessary to its overthrow, their guilt will be aggravated by the importance of the duties they have violated, by the loss of all the good they might have done both to the temporal and spiritual concerns of their brethren, and by the unspeakable misery which they have actually occasioned; and that their punishment must be proportionably increased. On the other hand, every generous and noble principle of their souls ought to be called into action by the efforts of infidels and profligates for the ruin of mankind; by the glorious nature of the struggle in which they must engage; by the assurance of sufficient succour from the great source of light and power; and by the eternal and splendid reward which is promised to their magnanimity and perseverance.

To them are, in a particular manner, committed both the eternal and temporal interests of their brethren, and on their exertions chiefly depends the preservation of those fundamental principles of justice, humanity, and temperance, which pure religion so firmly establishes, and so awfully sanctions. The contest, in the present day, is not between one particular form of religion and another, but between the existence of any religion whatever, and the total extirpation of it; which last must be, of all calamities, the most dreadful

that ever assailed the human race. It is a foolish notion to suppose, and direct experience contradicts the supposition, that infidels are adverse to corrupt forms of Christianity only, and that they are (as they ought to be, if consistent with their profession,) more friendly to the faith and worship of protestants. The reverse is the case. Infidels are infinitely more lenient to the absurdities and corruptions of popery than to the pure doctrines which the reformation restored. The reason is obvious: the more absurd any form of Christianity is, a wider field is opened for their attacks against it, for the introduction of their schemes of deism, and, by easy consequence, for the dissemination of atheism itself; a system, at present, much more widely prevalent than good men are willing to suppose.

To the honour of the established clergy of both the churches of England and Scotland, the far greater part of them has been decidedly hostile to the atheistical doctrines of the French school. Less aversion, I shall not say, more favour, has been shown to this abominable sect by dissenters in both countries. Charity obliges us, and reason also disposes us, to believe that this is to be ascribed rather to political than to *religious*, or, to speak more properly, *irreligious* motives. The success of the French atheistical system is connected with the success of certain political opinions, and, for the sake of the latter, the former is not opposed. Great zeal is professed against popery, and its overthrow is a subject of great exultation. This is just and becoming in all who have any regard for pure Christianity. But the same principle ought certainly to inspire still greater aversion from atheism openly professed, and followed in conduct; or, if this is considered as an exaggeration, which I am far from granting that it is, at least, from manifest, avowed, bigoted, and fanatical deism!

As the obligation is strong on all professed Christians, especially in the present times, to evince the efficacy of religious conviction by a virtuous and holy life; it is particularly so, on the clergy. If ever it was necessary to make *their light shine, that men seeing their good works may glorify their father which is in heaven*, that necessity exists at present. By the purity of the lives of Christians in general, and particularly of those whose peculiar office it is to teach and defend religion, its cause is most effectually served, and the calumnies of its enemies triumphantly confuted. Nothing has done so much injury to the interests of Christianity, as the unchristian lives of its professors. There is, in mankind, a general propensity to judge of the truth of any religious system by the conduct of those who have embraced it. Hence, the enemies of our holy faith, perceiving that it produces not those blessed effects on manners, which we maintain ought to flow from the belief of it, transfer, to the doctrines of Christ, that disgrace which ought to rest solely with the vices of Christians. Their reasoning is certainly fallacious and unfair; for, whatever be the conduct of those who profess them, the doctrines and precepts of Christianity remain equally true and excellent; nor is it to be ques-

tioned that they produce the most salutary effects in the hearts and lives of thousands of believers, who, cultivating holiness in *secret*, shall be openly rewarded by their heavenly Father. But if Christians had, in general, lived more conformably to their profession, fewer cavils would have been raised against Christianity. It may be safely asserted, that the happy change which it produced in converts to the primitive church, that that admirable perfection of divine morality, that incarnate spirit of evangelical excellence which they displayed, were as effectual for the propagation of the gospel, as the miracles by which its celestial origin was attested and confirmed. If the happy period shall ever arrive (and may God grant that it may be hastened!) when the knowledge and belief of pure, unadulterated, restored, Christianity shall generally reform those vices which the corruptions or the ignorance of it have so much contributed to engender and cherish, the most effectual answer will be given to the calumnies of its enemies; the streams will declare the purity of the fountain from which they flow: and, while *peace and good-will reign among men, glory will also be given to God in the highest.*

V. To the people, in general, the lesson, conveyed by the striking events of our times, runs in this strain:—"Beware of revolutions of government, and of all sudden and violent changes. Beware lest, instead of some partial inconveniences you now experience, and think intolerable grievances, you draw, on yourselves, the unqualified pressure of irreparable calamities. Guard against the inflammatory addresses, or secret suggestions of insidious demagogues, who endeavour to rouse your passions, as the instruments of their ambition, and of your misery. Such men are always tyrants in their hearts. They wish to shake off all established control, to obtain much greater for themselves, and their connexions. They have liberty constantly in their mouths, and oppression in their thoughts. The profligacy of the present age has introduced a distinction between public, and private character, as if a bad man, in private life, might be a real patriot. But, there is no foundation for this distinction in the nature of things; and pretended regard for the rights of men, when united with private depravity, will ever be found to cover the most ambitious and tyrannical designs. View the greater part of demagogues, and of those who aspire at this distinction in their own families, and in every relation in which they are called to act, and you perceive them haughty, overbearing, impatient of contradiction, and executing, with a high hand, every measure they have adopted. Is it possible that, if such men were invested with civil power, they would, in opposition to their own interest and exaltation, maintain, with inflexible integrity, and fortitude, the genuine principles of liberty, and of the equal enjoyment of right? In order to continue the delusion among the multitude, they would never cease to talk and harangue on these topics; but, while their speech was so magnanimous, their actions would bear every expression of iniquity and usurpation. What has the French revolution at-

tested, but one uninterrupted series of jargon, and cant, and noise about liberty and the rights of man, conjoined with the violation of every civil and religious right, with the most unqualified oppression, and with the most atrocious cruelty in every variety of shape?

"The lower classes of the community, which turbulent and seditious men chiefly use as their instruments, commonly gain least by every innovation. The anarchy and distress, which popular commotions produce, arrest the progress of industry, the source of their subsistence. The profits and honours, arising from successful insurrections, are seized by those who concerted and conducted them. The situation of their humble followers either remains as it was before, or is rendered worse by the oppression with which usurpation is accompanied. When you have the happiness to live under a constitution of government founded on principles of liberty both civil and religious, and administered with moderation and mildness, cherish the enjoyment as one of the most precious gifts of heaven; acquiesce cheerfully in the dictates of law, and willingly submit to constitutional authority, which is the safeguard of your lives, your properties, your reputations, your liberties, of all domestic comfort, of whatever you account most valuable and dear. If you see abuses, and desire the reformation of them, endeavour to obtain this by regular, calm, and constitutional means. But, above all, read in the horrible example of France, understand, and remember, that religion is the grand basis of social union, the foundation of virtue, the source of true happiness, whether private or public, domestic or civil; that, when men abandon God and his worship, he gives them up to all the workings, and all the consequences of a reprobate mind; and, when they abjure and blaspheme the heavenly father of the great family of mankind, they become the slaves of that infernal fiend who is the tempter to wickedness, and the author of misery."

VI. All Christians are certainly called, by the complexion of the present times, to value their religion as the most precious treasure, to adhere to it with firmness, and to exert themselves, to the utmost of their abilities, for its defence and extension. Every sincere believer of the gospel blesses God *for his unspeakable gift of Jesus Christ*, and is firmly persuaded, that, as *life and immortality are brought to light by the gospel*, so, *he has great joy and peace in believing*. With such glorious prospects as our divine religion unfolds to us, with such blessed assurances of reconciliation with God, and of eternal happiness as it gives, with such complete evidence of its truth as it lays before us, how different is the condition of man, thus enlightened and supported, than when left to his own uncertain speculations, and abandoned to his own unassisted weakness. Degradation is converted into dignity, terror into composure, and distress into happiness. Can any Christian, then, behold, with indifference, the impious attempts of infidels and atheists to wage war with heaven itself, to deface God's fairest work on earth, his second creation of man to righteousness and holiness, and to snatch, from him, the

firmest support of virtue, and the most soothing consolation of calamity and affliction. Shall the divine instructions, the glad news of salvation, the blessed sound of the glorious gospel of peace, proclaimed by the Son of God, and by his inspired apostles, *seem as idle tales*, and be classed with the absurdities of heathen mythology? Shall the first teachers of Christianity have sealed, with their blood, their testimony to its truth, only to obtain, in these last days, the character of weak and deluded fanatics? Shall so many bloody persecutions have been undergone, with unshaken patience, and undaunted fortitude, for the establishment of Christianity; shall such cruel sufferings have been endured, so many valuable and exemplary lives have been sacrificed, and such magnanimous resistance have been opposed to spiritual tyranny, for the glorious reformation of religion; shall Christianity, thus, have been planted, propagated, and restored at such a vast expence of divine interposition, and of human virtue; and shall, in these latter times, a sect of false philosophers proclaim that the truth of God is a lie, and endeavour to extinguish its light? No: it is impossible that any, who understand, and have sincerely embraced the doctrines of Christianity, and professed obedience to its precepts, can be deluded by this impotent sophistry. Let those, who have never known our religion, but in its grossest corruptions, who have never felt its divine influence on their hearts, who have never seriously reflected on the nature and perfections, or even on the evidences of the existence of the Supreme Being; let such lend an ear to the miserable sophisms by which the enemies of religion support and propagate their absurd and pernicious doctrines, which both outrage heaven, and sap the foundations of society. But, no person, who has ever studied Christianity, and been convinced, on rational grounds, of its truth, can run the smallest risk of being shaken in his belief, and much less, of being perverted in his conduct, by the arguments of the enemies of religion, which are frequently repeated, because they are destitute of all solidity, in order that the frequency of their application may compensate their want of strength. Indeed, to this wretched ignorance, and culpable neglect of Christianity, are chiefly owing the calamities which have overwhelmed the country, where this irreligious frenzy principally prevails, as well as most of those which its arms have subdued. When the arts of imposture were detected and exposed, and the chains of superstition were broken, the true doctrine of Christ was unknown; and the reveries of diseased philosophy, meeting with no opposition from the dictates either of sound reason, or of divine revelation, were palmed upon mankind as truths equally solid and salutary.

SECTION III.

Of the happy Tendency of Christianity to produce temporal, and, particularly, national Happiness.

THE prevailing passion of the times is the establishment of such forms of government as are most conducive to the happiness of mankind. However laudable this object may be in itself, the result of its prosecution has, hitherto, been disorder, carnage, and misery. Whether any thing beneficial and salutary may, afterwards, arise, in compensation for such calamities, is still matter of uncertainty. But, when projected improvements are begun on false principles, it is much to be apprehended that the ultimate result will hardly be productive of happiness, as far, at least, as the views of fanatical philosophers are concerned. That divine direction may probably draw good out of evil has already been shown. This, however, cannot be pleaded in behalf of systems which directly produce the evil, and have no natural tendency to the remoter good.

If the Christian morality, which is the only part of the Christian scheme, with which, as having immediate influence on the happiness of society, we are, at present, concerned, be the purest that was ever delivered to mankind, the best adapted to every capacity, and confirmed by the most efficacious sanctions, whatever system of polity either rejects this altogether, or enfeebles its energy, must, in so far, counteract the moral improvement of our species, and, of consequence, its greatest happiness. The chief object of all good laws is to establish the grand principles of justice, equity, and humanity. By the Christian religion this very end is uniformly pursued. In as far, then, as sound morality should constitute the essence of all just and salutary legislation, in so far the Christian precepts ought to be cherished by civil rulers, and the sacred source from which they proceed, and the supreme authority by which they are sanctioned, to be constantly kept in view, in order that greater force and efficacy may be given to those rules of action which are the bands and supports of civil society. It has, of late, become a popular tenet that political institutions ought to have no connexion with religion, and neither to support, nor to be supported by it; in a word, that national religion is equally pernicious to religious principle, and to the public welfare. From the union of politics and religion, it has been maintained, have proceeded the impostures of priestcraft, the worst arts of oppressive politics, and the prostitution of piety to the most flagitious purposes. Hence, the only means of securing, to religion, her uncontaminated influence, and of depriving political craft of one of its most powerful engines, is to separate religious, from political, institutions, and never to suffer them, in future, to form any alliance.

If, by religion, be understood only a certain system of speculative

opinions, whose object is the establishment or maintenance of a certain form of religious ceremonies, without any regard to their influence on morals, the truth of these propositions will not be denied. The whole strength of the argument lies in supposing that religion and morality are founded on different principles, and lead to different results; in a word, that religion and superstition are the same. But, if this opinion be false (as it most certainly is), if religion is no more to be confounded with superstition, than erudition with pedantry, or economy with avarice, equally false must be every conclusion drawn from this hypothesis. If the proper notion of religion be, in general, the method of pleasing God by practising, on just principles, every domestic, social, and civil virtue; so far is it from being true that civil government should disclaim all connexion with religious institutions, that the more it proceeds on those principles, which pure and undefiled religion prescribes and enforces, the more likely it is to attain the ends for which it is appointed; and the more it departs from them, the more corrupt it will be in itself, and the more pernicious to society. The only question then is, not whether every form of religion should be equally patronised or equally rejected by any state, or whether political and religious interests be totally separate, and independent of each other, but whether the religion, adopted by any state, be true or false, salutary or pernicious. For, a civil community ought surely to advance and protect that system of religion, which it is convinced has a tendency to promote the highest happiness of mankind, for the same reasons that any individual, who is impressed with such conviction, not only may, but is even bound, in conscience, to encourage and extend it, without encroaching, however, on the rights of those who may differ from him. If civil duties form an essential branch of religious precept, and if these duties are more strongly enforced by religious motives, than they can possibly be by human laws, it must be an egregious defect in every system of government to disregard those principles and institutions, which afford the most efficacious means of advancing the great ends which it ought constantly to pursue.

It has, indeed, been frequently asserted, that Christianity, considered as a system of duty, can have no auspicious influence on the civil prosperity of mankind, and must even have a contrary effect, by directing men's views wholly to another world, and, thus, disqualifying every sincere and zealous professor of it from discharging the most important duties of a citizen. This false notion, which, I believe, was first broached by Rousseau, has had great influence in bringing pure Christianity into discredit among all those who consider religion only as a political engine. As, to the misfortune of mankind, the greater part of politicians have adopted political systems formed on the most contracted scale, subservient only to the ambition, or the interest of a few, and not to the general welfare of the community, it is no wonder that they have been either totally indifferent to an institution which embraces the highest good, both temporal and eternal, not of one nation or country only, but of the whole human race, or have patronised those corruptions

of it which were most compatible with their selfish and illicit purposes. Thus, politics and religion have both been corrupted, and have mutually tended to corrupt each other more and more. But, because vicious politics have contributed to corrupt Christianity, and corrupted Christianity has contributed to support vicious politics, it will not follow that the pure religion of Christ will not have the happiest influence on the civil condition of mankind. The reverse will be found, on the slightest examination, to be the case. Of this some of the principal reasons have been already stated, and it will still more evidently appear by considering the chief objections which have been made to the effects of the Christian precepts on civil conduct.

Christianity, it has been said, inculcates no patriotism, rouses to no heroic deeds, and fires not the soul with the love of glory. The answer is, that this very circumstance, by affording an instance of benevolent comprehension unknown to any other religion whatever, is a striking proof both of its intrinsic excellence, and of the divine source from which that excellence flows. Christianity inculcates not patriotism in express words, because her influence is not confined to one particular sect or country, but tends to unite the whole human race in one great and happy family, of which God is the Father. But, she inculcates universal benevolence, in which patriotism is included, and opposed to which, far from being a virtue, it is a most pernicious and tyrannical vice. Of this the patriotic virtues of the celebrated heroes of antiquity frequently exhibited the most flagrant examples. Christianity animates not to feats of martial valour, because she abhors carnage and desolation, because "Christ came not to destroy, but to save men's lives," and because it was the object of his doctrine to form men to that heavenly temper which would banish war from the earth, and secure everlasting peace by the practice of everlasting righteousness. But, in defence of truth and right, she requires the most undaunted fortitude, and the most unshaken perseverance, commanding us "not to fear those who can kill the body, but to fear him who can cast both soul and body into hell." Incorporating, with her canon, all the Scriptures of the Old Testament, she records, with honour and distinguished applause, the glorious exploits of those illustrious champions, who fought the battles of the Lord against the heathen, and conducted his people to the promised land, or maintained them in the possession of it, by their prudence and valour. She also exhibits, for examples, a band of Christian heroes who, in the extent of their views, in the purity of their motives, and in the sublimity of their principles, as much surpassed the brightest patterns of pagan antiquity, as the sun outshines the lesser luminaries of the firmament. Christianity fires not the soul with the love of glory, because what is commonly called by this name is base in its origin, destructive in its operations, and miserable in its issue. But, she warms it with the love of God and of mankind; she excites it to aim at that most distinguished excellence which advances the glory of the former, by promoting the happiness of the latter, and, by diffusing truth and

virtue through the world; and she animates to these honourable and beneficent pursuits by holding up, as their reward, a "crown of glory, which is incorruptible, and fadeth not away."

With such extensive views, such elevated principles, and such animating motives, the true Christian must necessarily feel the full force of that genuine patriotism which consists in desiring and promoting, to the utmost of his power, the best interests of his country, in conjunction with a regard for that universal justice, which comprehends the whole human race, and loses not its force in the midst of hostility. When his country is assailed by the unjust attacks of external enemies, the pure flame of patriotism must burn in his breast with redoubled brightness and vigour. Fortune will be readily offered up to the public support, and life cheerfully exposed for the common defence. That temperance, which our holy religion inculcates, must strengthen its professors to endure military fatigue. Love of order and obedience to legal government, so strongly enjoined by the Christian morality, will make them observe the most regular discipline. A just sense of the blessings of well-regulated society, joined to the right appreciation of civil and religious freedom, a confidence in the protection of the Almighty, and the hopes of immortal glory will reconcile them to hardship in a good cause, make them despise danger and death, and animate them with a courage which the most formidable enemy will not damp. Religion inspires with a valour which is not rash and inconsiderate, but manly, firm, and collected. Of all the armies in the world a skilful general would choose most to command, and least to encounter, that which should be composed of men inured to temperance and honest labour, accustomed to obedience and discipline, considering each other as brethren, and members not only of a terrestrial but also of a heavenly community, assured of the blessing of the *Lord of hosts*, and determined, under this, to sacrifice their lives to their country's defence. Such exactly would be the army composed of Christians sincere and rightly informed. So far, therefore, is our religion from being adverse to military virtue, in its best and noblest sense, that it inspires, encourages, and invigorates it, in a degree unknown to any other system of religious belief whatever. Influenced by such principles, animated by such motives, and looking up for protection to Him, *whose name is the God of hosts*, an army would lead victory in its ranks. Nor would that intemperate desire of aggrandizement, and that false security which victory so commonly produces, ever expose men of this character to disgraceful reverses. For, as the maintenance of their rights would ever be the only spring of their warlike operations; so would it also be their termination. They would show themselves as ready to lay down their arms, as they were able to hold them. In the midst of triumph they would abhor war, and cherish the prospect, and facilitate the restoration of peace, on the most moderate and equitable terms.

All the social and civil virtues are so fully and strongly enforced by Christianity, that, by strict and complete obedience to its dictates, those follies and vices which are the bane of civil life would

be entirely removed, and, even by the tolerable observance of them, would be greatly diminished. Neither princes and governors would be oppressive, nor subjects rebellious, nor fellow citizens unjust to each other; but every state would be a family of brethren, assisting each other in the progress of their terrestrial journey towards that everlasting city, "whose builder and maker is God." Different states would only be different families, connected not only by the ties of a common nature, but by the still stronger bonds of Christian union, and of their relation to one Saviour, and head of the universal church. If ever the time shall come when the dreadful scourge of war, now so hypocritically deplored by those who constantly aggravate and extend it, shall be banished from the earth, we may safely predict that this will be only when the Christian religion, evinced to the understandings, has taken firm hold of the hearts, and influences the conduct of men.

The mild, the amiable, the domestic virtues are prescribed, by our religion, in a degree infinitely pre-eminent to that which any system of mere morality can exhibit. And what, in every system of duty, is of the first consequence, it enforces its precepts by the most powerful sanctions, reaching not the external actions of men only, but penetrating into the inmost recesses of the heart. It encourages obedience by the promise of the most precious and exalted rewards, intimidates transgression by the menaces of the most dreadful punishments, and strengthens the soul by the most efficacious succours.

Let infidel philosophers try to substitute, instead of this admirable system of duty, any other of equal efficacy. They will soon find how ineffectual their abstract speculations are to affect the heart, to restrain the passions, to overcome the power of temptation, to check the insolence of prosperity, to moderate the oppressive spirit of power, to bridle the licentiousness of tumult, to soothe the pangs of affliction, and to ensure the practice of virtue in every circumstance and condition of life. Woful experience has already proved that their vague and unprincipled speculations, even when clothed with the most fascinating appearances of benevolence, and adorned with all the colourings of popular oratory, have produced nothing but profligacy, barbarity, and devastation. Man requires a fixed and definite code, not abstract theory, for a rule of conduct. That rule must be dictated by an authority, acknowledged, and revered, as supreme, and that authority must be maintained by penal sanctions, which cannot be eluded. All this religion alone can supply; and the Christian religion has this peculiar advantage above every other, that, while it touches all those springs of hope and fear, by which mankind must ever be moved, it also possesses such evidence of its truth as can stand the most scrupulous examination.

If abstract philosophy, however solid and sound, which is the reverse of infidel and atheistical systems, is ever to be held sufficient for the regulation of life, why are not the abettors of such opinions, at least, so far consistent with themselves, as also to maintain that

all the laws of civil society, and all the penalties by which they are enforced, ought to give place to those speculations of abstract morality which they proclaim, to the world, with so much pomp, and affected benevolence, as the highest perfection of reason, and the firmest bonds of union among men? If they reply, that, without laws enforced by visible penalties, society could not subsist, then, the same arguments also establish the necessity of religious principle, because, from this, even human laws derive that obligatory force, without a sense of which all human sanctions would not be sufficient to ensure even that degree of obedience which now exists in the world. Such speculators, therefore, if they are not blinded by prejudice, or hardened by corruption, must acknowledge that the admirable adaptation of the Christian morality to the nature, the circumstances, and the general condition of man, is a strong internal proof of its divine origin, and a powerful recommendation of its utility. But, such men are little affected by considerations of disinterested benevolence. Vain-glory, and an intemperate desire of influencing the opinions of the world, and of directing it at pleasure, are the real motives of those actions which they ascribe to the purest philanthropy. Never, surely, was that disposition so glaringly manifested as in the present times, nor this shameful hypocrisy so infamously practised. Yet, these are the men who vilify the Saviour of the world, who, after a life of unparalleled beneficence, endured the most excruciating death, to accomplish the design which infinite goodness alone could conceive. These are the men who calumniate the character of his apostles, who relinquished every worldly prospect for the propagation of truth and virtue; and, in a very short space of time, turned such vast numbers of the human race "from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to the living and true God."

Thus, the doctrines and precepts of Christianity must, from their very nature, have the happiest effects on all the sources of national welfare. "Righteousness exalteth a nation: but sin is the reproach of any people." That corruption of manners, civil dissensions, the inexorable inveteracy of party-spirit, and uncontrolled ambition, have uniformly produced the subversion of political communities; and that the contrary virtues have established and preserved their security, their power, their splendour, and their happiness, the history of the world sufficiently evinces.

Corruption, universally spread through a nation, taints and poisons every spring of public prosperity, and destroys the vital principles of civil association. For, neither good laws, nor the vigorous execution of them, will ensure the public weal, unless a considerable proportion of virtue still influence the community. Without this, the state must necessarily fall to pieces, submitting either to the yoke of a foreign invader, or reduced to the most wretched and contemptible condition by internal disorders. To the preservation of a free constitution of government purity of morals is particularly necessary. Freedom and general profligacy are incompatible with each other. What is profligate freedom? It is the

freedom of confusion, of tumult, of anarchy, of rapine, and murder, and every species of wickedness. It is the escape of every furious and pestilential passion of the human soul. It is, in the first stage of settlement, the uncontrolled dominion of a powerful few, and, in the last, the hopeless subjection of all to the arbitrary and relentless sway of a single despot; the only form of government of which such a people is any longer susceptible. It is, therefore, the greatest absurdity to suppose that a nation, extremely corrupt, can establish, on durable foundations, a constitution compatible only with great simplicity of manners, and with the general prevalence of religious principle.

To the British nation also, enjoying a free government, founded, indeed, on principles very different from those of the French fanatics, it is a matter of the most serious concern, that we cannot preserve our invaluable privileges, whether civil or religious, but by the same virtues by which our ancestors obtained them—by piety, industry, sobriety, and undaunted courage in defence of our country. By these virtues alone, proceeding from faith in Jesus Christ, and constantly influenced by it, can we expect the favour and blessing of God, as individuals, or as a community; and, without His protection, “who enlargeth and straiteneth the nations,” the deepest human policy is childish ignorance, and the greatest human power is contemptible imbecility.

The divine justice seems, moreover, particularly interested in the present distribution of conspicuous rewards and punishments to civil communities. On the grand theatre of political action, virtue and vice are both eminently displayed, and have a peculiar and diffusive influence on the happiness of mankind. It is necessary, therefore, that the rewards of the former, and the punishments of the latter, should be marked in the most distinguishable manner. In the present world alone the characteristic distinction of nations subsists. In the next, there will be neither “Greek, nor Jew, Barbarian, Scythian; bond or free: tongues, kindreds, and nations” will be no more. The blessed and the reprobate will be the only classes and divisions of men. If the divine government is to be manifested with regard to political societies, which seems still more necessary, for the interests of virtue and religion, than with regard to individuals, the sanctions of the divine laws must, as far as relates to the former, be executed in the present state of things. That they are completely executed, in the most invariable manner, the history of all ages, as has been already observed, sufficiently testifies. Thus, both the natural tendency of things themselves, and our notions of the divine justice, concur to convince us that the pure precepts of the gospel must have the happiest effects in advancing the welfare of every nation by which they are respected and observed.

SECTION IV.

Inferences from the preceding Discussion.

IF it has fully appeared that piety and virtue, and, particularly, that pure system, both of theory and practice, which Christianity inculcates, must necessarily have the happiest influence on national prosperity; and that irreligion and vice are the certain causes of public, as well as of private, misery; it follows that every sentiment of rational patriotism, of a regard for our country, for its laws, its liberties, its prosperity, and its honour, loudly calls for a reformation of manners, and a revival of "pure and undefiled religion." It may be alleged that the corruption of the times has ever been a subject of complaint, and that, as this corruption, equally prevalent in preceding ages, has, hitherto, produced no catastrophe, we have no reason to apprehend a worse fate to our country than our forefathers experienced. Although the premises were true in their utmost extent, the conclusion, drawn from them, would be false and delusive. For, if the vices of our ancestors were as great as those of their posterity, this circumstance, so far from affording any just cause of composure and security, ought the more to awaken our apprehensions. The evil would, in this case, be of longer continuance, have acquired a more inveterate and confirmed complexion, and be, thus, approaching nearer and nearer to its fatal termination. It would appear a strange argument, indeed, that the distemper, with which any person was affected, was not dangerous, because it was deeply rooted in his constitution, and had bidden defiance to every remedy that had been administered for its cure.

But, if the case be duly considered, it will be found that the vices, now prevalent among us, have a more fatal tendency, with regard to national welfare, than those of preceding times. It is readily allowed, that depravity has been too prevalent in every age of the world, and that every state of civil society, like every period of human life, has its peculiar vices. But, there are vices, which, like certain diseases, are of such a debilitating kind, that, when the civil community is deeply infected with them, it can hardly ever recover its pristine vigour, but must die by a gradual decay. It is, therefore, of the greatest consequence to guard against these from the beginning, or, if they have been unhappily contracted, to apply to them the most efficacious remedies. Luxury, effeminacy, and voluptuousness; a sordid insatiable thirst of gain, as the only means of procuring such indulgences; profusion of expence, yet the highest estimation of riches; selfishness, and indifference to the true welfare and glory of men's country; real, or affected infidelity, an open contempt of things sacred, or a constrained observance of them—these are the vices which characterize the age, and these are the vices which have the strongest tendency to subvert national felicity.

Our depravity is greatly aggravated by the singular and distinguished privileges which we enjoy, and by our situation when compared with that of other contiguous countries, groaning under the complicated calamities of conquest, extortion, pillage, desolation, and every species of degradation that can fall to the lot of man; when compared with that people which, while it glories in its victories, endures the most dreadful internal distresses. As this is the most striking proof of the divine benignity towards us; so, it demands our most lively gratitude, and, as the only proper expression of it, loudly calls for a reformation of manners.

"The judgments of God," it must be repeated, "are abroad in the earth." He is exercising his justice on political communities. Some nations he is afflicting with the most dreadful calamities. Hardly any country of Europe is exempted from some species of afflicting dispensations. Our own situation is generally confessed to be critical. All concur in the desire of its amelioration by exchanging the calamities of war for the blessings of peace. Repeated attempts have, in vain, been made to attain the happy purpose. But, in the midst of various schemes of national improvement, and of an universal desire of peace, of the unmolested pursuits of commerce and wealth, of the undisturbed enjoyment of ease, affluence, and tranquillity, how few look up to God, with the eye of faith, with the soul of piety, and with the heart of contrition? Is confidence placed in the divine goodness, and the hope of brighter days excited by the views of true religion? Have public calamities produced any tendency to national reformation of manners, any plans for its commencement? The existence of abuses, the necessity of their correction, the most effectual means of its accomplishment are daily agitated, and discussed. But, no mention is ever made of the only radical and effectual *reform*, a *reform* of heart and conduct. It is astonishing, that, in this *reforming* and *regenerating* age, the *reformation* of manners and the *regeneration* of the soul should be entirely forgotten. By some our distresses are imputed to our rulers; by others, to their opponents; by both, to some cause in which the complainant has no share; and by none, to the grand, the primary, and the universal one—a general corruption of morals, tainting the first springs of national welfare, destroying unanimity, masking, with the most specious appearances, the most selfish and unlawful passions, enervating our vigour, spreading dissension, and animosity, removing those grand, elevating, and unconquerable principles which religion alone can supply, and exposing us to the merited vengeance of heaven. If every person would seriously think of reforming himself, a general reformation of manners would be the necessary consequence; and this would produce every other salutary reform. If political abuses exist, and that they do exist is undeniable, they are the offspring of national corruption. The fountain itself must be purified before it can send forth pure and salutary streams. The influence of genuine religion, and of virtue, its consequence, would speedily restore health and vigour to the whole political body. Without this every other medicine may palliate, but

can never radically cure ; may delay, but never can completely prevent the fatal issue of national distemper. The mischief is, that the more mankind are corrupted, the less sensible they are of their corruption, and the more they are disposed to complain of its natural and necessary effects, and to ascribe them to every cause, but the real one, which, till removed, must continue to operate with increasing violence.

That deistical writings have more powerfully, than any other cause, whatever, contributed, in this, and other countries of Europe, to the dissemination of vice, and to the destruction of all those principles which either adorn or preserve society, can hardly be doubted by any reflecting mind. The pernicious effects of those writings have been proved by the most melancholy experience ; and are depicted, in the most glaring colours, in the convulsions and calamities of the present times. The futility of their reasonings has been sufficiently evinced by the masterly answers which have been made to them, as the preceding volumes of the learned and accurate Leland have clearly shown, in relation to the deistical performances, of any reputation, which had made their appearance before he wrote. Those, which have been since published, although, in many instances, the productions of men eminent in the literary world, have also been triumphantly refuted. An account of these, and of the defences opposed to them, might form a very useful additional volume : and, if God shall grant, to the writer of this Appendix, the necessary health and leisure, he may, perhaps, turn his thoughts to this undertaking, which, however, he should be happy to see executed by some abler hand.

After all, it is not so much the strength of deistical arguments, that has given such currency to infidelity, as the corrupt inclinations which they so strongly favour ; and nothing can so powerfully tend to check these, as the experience of the evil consequences of their indulgence. Religion has, in former times, been exposed to contempt by the cant and jargon of its zealous, but ignorant, or hypocritical defenders and propagators. Philosophy, endeavouring to rise on her ruins, and load even true religion with all the censure, which is due to the false only, has, at last, had its turn of disgrace. It is surely impossible to conceive greater nonsense, absurdity, and madness, than have been vented under that specious name. Philosophy has been supposed to consist with the rejection of every principle of common sense, and of every dictate of experience, with barbarism, cruelty, and the devastation of all that is fair, and good, and honourable in life. A person, who considers the vulgar and common acceptation of the term, as established by recent use, must dread the appellation of a philosopher as implying every thing absurd and pernicious. But, the wise and the good will ever discriminate between the real, and the fictitious names, between the use and abuse of things. As they know that true religion, contained in the divine oracles, is the most precious gift of heaven ; so, they will be more strongly attached to it by those very corruptions which have proceeded from the ignorance and depravity of men. In like

manner, while they abhor that pretended philosophy, which is disseminated by imposture, received by credulity, cherished by vice, and detected, at last, by its baneful consequences, they will ever respect and cultivate that real improvement of reason, which is the result of experience, and of patient enquiry, which enlarges and humanizes the soul, strengthens every pure religious principle, extends the reign of order, peace, and happiness, and unites the highest enjoyments of the present life with the exhilarating assurance of a blessed immortality. A philosophical mind of this complexion will regard every infidel writer as an enemy to the best interests of mankind, will discourage, to the utmost of his power, and oppose his principles; and, although, in conformity to the express dictates, and to the general spirit of our holy faith, he will hate every persecution of his person, or defamation of his character, will view his attempts to subvert the grand principles of religion, with contempt, or abhorrence, as he appears to be influenced either by a weak judgment, or by a corrupt heart.

I N D E X

TO THE

VIEW OF THE DEISTICAL WRITERS.

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